

Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



May 12

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'Damsels in Distress'

JEAN RENOIR

the timeless 'La Grande Illusion'

CLAIRE DENIS

is 'Beau Travail' her greatest?

GUY MADDIN

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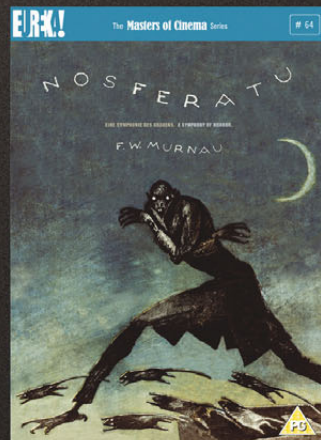
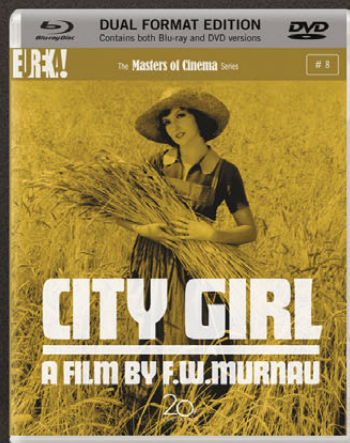
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COVER

Aki Kaurismäki photographed by Nicolas Guerin, Getty/Contour

Next issue
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8 May

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Welcome. Whit Stillman may not have vanished quite so far off the map as Jake Williams, the wilds-dwelling subject of Ben Rivers's *Two Years at Sea* (far left and p.24), but it has been 14 years between *The Last Days of Disco* and Stillman's wonderfully whimsical follow-up *Damsels in Distress* (left, and p.28). A very different but equally individual indie stalwart back on form this month is our cover star Aki Kaurismäki, whose dour vision is mellowed by humour in *Le Havre* – and in course of his *S&S* interview (p.16). Finnish humour of a broader sort is on show in Nazis-on-the-moon romp *Iron Sky* (p.44), while Canadian maverick Guy Maddin is tracked down to the Paris basement where he's up to his most outlandish movie-homage tricks yet with the 'Seances Project' (p.46). "Film needs to be more independent," proclaimed the Oberhausen Manifesto 50 years ago (p.32). On this evidence, their wish has been granted. ♦♦ **Nick James**

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NICK JAMES

THE FUTURE IS HERE



Cinephiles still mostly prefer to think about films as the creation of single auteurs. And most filmmakers are so tied into the struggle to get films made that the idea of banding

together to make wider political or even film-political statements seems a luxury they can't afford. And yet, throughout history, film manifestos have been written by groups of filmmakers. In this issue we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto, the declaration credited with having sparked the changes that led to the New German Cinema of the 1970s.

My short survey of film manifestos (see p.32) has led me to wonder what a manifesto for cinema right now might look like. The clichés about our times are mostly about the speed of change and the loss of affect. So the question is whether there's time to draw breath and consider what might be needed to galvanise cinema with a new spirit that might resensitise the viewer to important realities when the ground (or platform) he or she is standing on is shifting too fast. Happily, manifestos are like reliable buses – you can always find one if you need one. The evening after I finished writing my article, curator Steven Bode told me about one he'd commissioned from pop/rock/culture critic Paul Morley for the artists' film show 'Tomorrow Never Knows' at Jerwood Visual Arts.

Morley is not a filmmaker (though his sister Carol is a very fine one), but he is the kind of media figure born to write manifestos. He emerged out of the golden era of rock writing at the *New Musical Express*, went on to create the buzz around Frankie Goes to Hollywood and then morphed into the postmodern TV pundit of choice during the 1990s. As a revolutionary document, his 'The Chameleon of Dancing Truth: A Declaration' may only be as effective as an art catalogue or postcard – it's a vivid, Thesaurus-driven cascade of the sort of statements that wouldn't look out of place on a Katharine Hamnett T-shirt in the 1980s. But the great thing about it is that

explains its own inadequacy and has stimulating ideas about where we are now.

What attracted me most were these two declarations: "Ila. There is no *crisis*, when it comes to the manifesto, because there is no sentimental longing for their return, no real sense that they are necessary any more, if ever they were necessary, because the future, if not the future most manifestos demanded, urged, anticipated, created, revived has arrived dead on time in some form, replacing a general sense of wonder about the future."

"Ilb. These days when the internet is written all over time and place everyone appears to be in control of their own destinies so that each *screenager tweet purchase response hoax entry stunt message search post bargain...* [etc] is in itself a form of manifesto. Everyone is potentially a situationist so to speak, a producer-consumer of total culture creation."

The idea that the present is so destabilisingly 'futuristic' that it's killed the general feeling of wonder about the future makes some sense

Though this isn't entirely free of the ring of the usual 'let a thousand flowers bloom' twaddle digital-age marketeers have been foisting on us for a long time, its idea that the present is so destabilisingly 'futuristic' that it's killed the general feeling of wonder about the future makes some sense, especially in terms of the new cinephilia's current fascination with vintage techniques and technology.

The second point also chimes with another comment that arrested me in the last few weeks. It comes from Nico Baumbach's excellent article 'All That Heaven Allows: What Is, Or Was, Cinephilia?' in *Film Comment*: "The question becomes whether the Web enables not so much a new film culture centred on an affirmation of cinema as a new internet culture centred on the affirmation of cinephilia." In other words, if writing about cinema is indeed the constant making of manifestos, then filmmakers are in danger of leaving the matter of film polemics entirely to critics. But perhaps it was ever thus.



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Jason and the Argonauts ^{PG*}

+ Panel Discussion

To mark the publication of Ray Harryhausen's *Fantasy Scrapbook*, animation experts **Nick Park**, **Mark Waring** and **Tony Dalton** join us in conversation after a rare screening of this special effects masterpiece.

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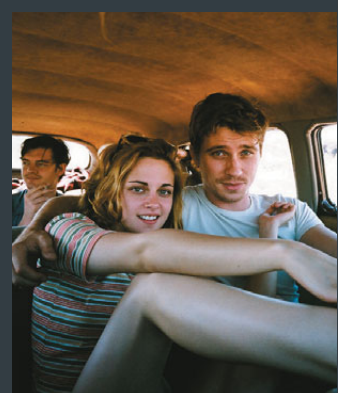
THE BIGGER PICTURE



Road runners

Jack Kerouac's 1957 classic 'On the Road' brought international fame to the writer and his fellow Beats – and has provided the template ever since for young travellers seeking their 'kicks'. The book's example has also reverberated through the movies, from 'Easy Rider' to just about any road movie you care to mention. But attempts to bring the book itself to the screen foundered; Kerouac himself wrote in vain to Marlon Brando in 1957, suggesting the actor play Dean Moriarty to his own

Sal Paradise. In the late 1970s Francis Ford Coppola bought the rights to Kerouac's book, but despite many hopeful starts he failed to get the project to the screen until he approached Walter Salles after seeing 2004's 'The Motorcycle Diaries'. Salles cast Sam Riley as Paradise (above left), Garrett Hedlund as Moriarty (above right), and Kristen Stewart as Moriarty's wife Marylou (right). The finished film, a hot tip for Cannes 2012, is due in UK cinemas in September.



Devil in the flesh

Director Dominik Moll found inspiration in an English Gothic novel. By Roger Clarke

Known for his restrained and menacing psychodramas set in France – including *Harry, He's Here to Help* (2000) and *Lemming* (2005) – German-born film director Dominik Moll has adapted a spectacularly ripe and overheated 18th-century Gothic novel from England as his fourth directorial project.

The Monk by Matthew Lewis, the son of a prosperous slave-owner and a friend of Lord Byron, was published in 1796 and was an immediate success both as a novel and as a stage play. Its groundbreaking sense of the transgressive and the marginal electrified its British and Continental audience, although these very qualities continued to disgust the establishment right up to Edwardian times, when M.R. James deplored its lubricious quality.

Set in 17th century Spain, *The Monk* tells the story of Ambrosio, who gradually becomes subsumed by his own pathological carnality and forms a pact with the Devil. The film stars Vincent Cassel as Ambrosio and Geraldine Chaplin as The Abbess.

Luis Buñuel co-scripted a version of the novel with Jean-Claude Carrière in 1972, for a film finally directed by Ado Kyrou, but Moll avoided seeing it until he had finished filming. “I knew that there had been two adaptations [a second version was filmed in 1990 by Francisco Lara Polop, starring Paul McGann], but I didn’t want to know anything about them,” Moll observes when I meet him in London. “Kyrou was a former critic on *Positif* who was a specialist on erotic cinema, and it’s a completely different approach. It feels as if they did it on a weekend when they had too much wine. It was quite grotesque, more than my version. It ends up with Ambrosio elected as Pope – it’s very funny, a farce really.”

Moll had originally planned to film the project in England, in English, but production and funding issues forced a rethink. He got pretty far along the road with casting director Susie Figgis, and by all accounts had lined up the actor Toby Kebbell (*Dead Man's Shoes*, *War Horse*) for the lead, but it was not to be. Although planning to use a much younger actor for the lead, it seems the possibility of getting Vincent Cassel was too good an opportunity to miss.

Moll has brought his characteristic Germanic restraint to the story, but the challenge of doing so required controlling the notoriously physical



‘Vincent had never played characters with such restraint... he is an actor with a lot of energy, who can’t keep still’

and instinctive Cassel. Asked how he directed the actor, Moll replies: “We didn’t discuss it much because Vincent is not an actor who’s interested in psychological background. What interested me about Vincent was that he had never played characters with such restraint, because he is an actor with a lot of energy, who can’t keep still.” Cassel found the strict prohibitions that Moll put on his behaviour – not allowing him, for example, to improvise in the way he is used to – to be almost unbearable. “It was a real effort for him – between takes he was always running around!”

As a German director using a French lead on an English novel set in Spain, Moll relished the European aspect to it all. “When Lewis was about 17 he spent several months in Weimar,” he points out. “He read a lot of German literature and translated some later on and so he brought all that German influence to the Gothic English novel. He had contact with Goethe. And once he had written



“Just too Protestant”: Dominik Moll

The Monk, it in turn became a great influence in Germany. When Hoffmann wrote *The Elixir of the Devil*, it was almost a remake of *The Monk*. And also the French romantic writers like Victor Hugo were influenced – for example, the character of Frolo in the *Notre Dame de Paris* is very similar to Ambrosio.”

So what are the Germanic elements of the film? “It’s really the Faustian theme – this idea of having a deal with the Devil and selling one’s soul,” Moll explains. “I would associate it with a German influence, because in the Gothic novel up till then there were supernatural elements that always had a rational explanation. When you look at German Expressionist cinema, it’s all there also. When I was 18 I was very attracted to that kind of cinema.”

The film seems to have a touch of Pasolini and Borowczyk about it too. “It’s true that I have a thing with 1970s film,” Moll admits. “But it’s always difficult to say what is intentional. I’m a big fan of Pasolini.”

Unlike those directors, however, Moll is all about buttoned-down restraint. “I think it’s just to do with my style probably. In my other films things are rather restrained,” he concludes with a smile. “Retrospectively I think it could have been a little more baroque. And Catholic. But I guess it may be at heart I’m just too Protestant to do that!”

■ *‘The Monk’ is released on 27 April, and is reviewed on page 74*

● **Yorgos Lanthimos** of ‘Dogtooth’ fame is reportedly turning to period drama with ‘Balance of Power’, an adaptation of a 2008 radio drama by Deborah Davis about Queen Anne and her friendship with Sarah Churchill (wife of the Duke of Marlborough).

● **Terence Davies**, whose latest feature ‘The Deep Blue Sea’ recently opened in the States, is to follow that film with ‘Sunset Song’, an adaptation of the novel by Lewis Grassic Gibbon that Davies has long had his eye on. Set in Scotland in the early 20th century, it follows the trials of a young woman who must manage the family farm after her mother’s suicide and her father’s debilitating stroke. Casting is reportedly underway. The announcement follows earlier reports that Davies was planning to adapt ‘Mothers of Sorrows’, Richard McCann’s book about the life of an American family in Washington in the years after World War II.

● **Jerzy Skolimowski** is adapting Arkady Fiedler’s celebrated WWII novel ‘Squadron 303’, about a group of Polish fighter pilots who helped to defend Britain against German Luftwaffe attacks in the summer of 1940. Skolimowski is likely to direct the film himself.

● **Werner Herzog**, after starring as a villain opposite Tom Cruise in the forthcoming ‘One Shot’, is reportedly considering making an IMAX documentary about volcanoes. He told Screen International: “I have become friends with a great volcanologist from Cambridge University called Clive Oppenheimer. He wrote a wonderful book called ‘Eruptions That Shook the World’ about cataclysmic events of the past, some that almost wiped out the human race.” Herzog is also considering making a documentary on photographer Helmut Newton, and the long-gestating feature ‘Queen of the Desert’, set to star Naomi Watts as the turn-of-the-century British explorer and writer Gertrude Bell.

● **Sofia Coppola** (left) is currently shooting ‘The Bling Ring’, a story which, like her previous features ‘Lost in Translation’ and ‘Somewhere’, concerns the emptiness of celebrity. Sometime grunge-rockers Gavin Rossdale is reportedly playing a sleazy club promoter who helps thieves rob the homes of celebrities.

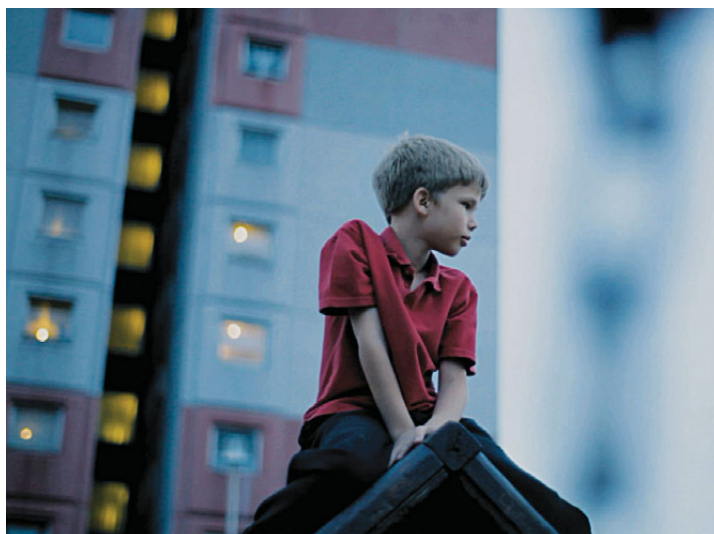


The persuaders

Patrick Russell *samples the best of corporate filmmaking at the IVCA Awards*

March 23 saw a lavish bash for the annual awards of the International Visual Communications Association, red-letter day for a billion-pound sector generally overlooked by the mainstream. Notwithstanding its name, the IVCA is a predominantly UK trade body whose members make film, video and digital moving image for all parts of the corporate, public and voluntary sectors. The resulting diverse body of work is, arguably, in more direct lineage from the filmmaking of the 1930s GPO Film Unit than is TV and cinema documentary. While the latter may claim this heritage in name – dishing out the annual Grierson Awards for exciting and innovative documentaries – the IVCA Awards are as engaging an index of society and the media it spawns.

Shown on platforms from cinema to cellphone and the ubiquitous YouTube, these films take us to the heart of the questions Grierson asked during an earlier era of recession and social division. What is film's affect and what its effect? Each of the 23 award-winning productions – intended to effect minuscule but measurable changes of attitude or



Realising full potential: 'Luke's World' won the IVCA Awards' Grand Prix

behaviour among viewers – offers a different answer.

In his opening address, IVCA CEO Marco Forgione emphasised the ubiquity of moving image and our decade's status as the 'Video Age' – one that Grierson, in his celluloid era, could only have dreamed of. He also paid tribute to the Central Office of Information, whose demise (reported by Sue Woods in *S&S* April) is seriously affecting the industry.

Frequent prizewinners the Edge

Picture Company took Best Direction and Best Script for *Companies Like Yours*, commissioned by Deloitte, which expertly borrows conventions from TV series like *24* for a gripping exposé of the risks of lax corporate IT security. *Sammy*, by Pretzel Films for Network Rail, combines a haunting interview with the survivor of a railway-trespass incident with dramatic reconstruction of events in which his teenage girlfriend perished. Industries under public-relations

stress – notably oil and banking – were prominent on screen, as in BP's subtle *The Startup Series* (by enterprising young production company Lonelyleap) and RBS's recruitment campaign *Where Can We Take You* (Pretzel Films).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, an elegant cartoon from A&N Creative for DMGT, suggests the importance of cultural diversity to today's corporate world. Casual Films won a prize for their lively combination of animation and live action in a film promoting Macmillan's online cancer-support services. The Industry Award for Communication Effectiveness went to *Sainsbury's Monthly Briefing* (by drpgroup) – a cinemagazine in the grand post-war tradition of the likes of *Mining Review*.

The Grand Prix went to *Luke's World*, by Maverick Television for the Private Equity Foundation, an NGO helping 'NEETs' to reach full potential. In direct lineage from films like *Housing Problems* (1935), *Luke's World* is set apart from competitors less by its serious subject matter than by the skill of its making – and its demonstrable efficacy. Marked by an understated command of camera position, frame composition and editing, it exemplifies film's power to influence viewers to improve the world around them – and can be viewed on Vimeo.

THE NUMBERS

Matinee idol

'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' has captured the 'grey pound', says Charles Gant

When British producers Graham Broadbent and Pete Czernin went to see then Fox Searchlight boss Peter Rice in his Los Angeles office, it was, says Broadbent, "one of those fortuitous meetings you can sometimes have". When they expressed curiosity as to why Rice's DVD player held a copy of *Cocoon*, Ron Howard's 1985 film about a group of elderly people given a new lease of life by aliens, their host replied: "There's an older audience, and we should be thinking about them." As luck would have it, the pair had been developing a comedy about outsourcing retirement to India, based on Deborah Moggach's novel *These Foolish Things*. Judi Dench

was already attached to star.

Three years later and the resulting film, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, is a bona-fide UK box-office smash, once again confirming the good sense in targeting the notoriously under-catered-for older demographic. As Fox Searchlight UK's Kate Gardiner says, "They have the money and they have the time. While we never wanted to alienate the broader audience, we wanted to show this older audience respect, and give them a film that they can take ownership of."

Although *Marigold* only topped the UK box office for a single weekend, it won 19 of its first 28 days of play, thanks to impressive weekday business. In the upscale Picturehouse chain, 35 per cent of tickets were sold before 5pm. Strong weekday and matinee success ("when the cinemas aren't so full of younger and noisier patrons," says Gardiner) is a sure-fire

signifier of an older audience skew. And unsurprisingly, *Marigold* has experienced a higher-than-average proportion of tickets sold with senior-citizen discounts.

But the expat comedy is not the only recent title that's benefited from this large and growing demographic. Indeed January and February, with *War Horse*, *The Artist*, *The Iron Lady* and *The Descendants*, provided what Gardiner calls "a brilliant trailer platform for our film". And the industry is still benefiting from "The King's Speech effect", a picture that attracted some people who had not visited a cinema in many years, and liked what they experienced. "Increasingly this audience is making cinemagoing a regular part of their lives," says Gardiner.

The only fly in the ointment has been the spring sunshine. "Our audience is much more affected by

'Grey pound' titles at UK box office

Film	Year	Gross
The King's Speech	2011	£47.73m
Calendar Girls	2003	£20.43m
The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel	2012	£15.67m*
Shirley Valentine	1989	£14.88m
Gosford Park	2001	£12.26m
The Iron Lady	2012	£9.58m*
It's Complicated	2010	£9.44m
The Queen	2006	£9.42m
Something's Gotta Give	2004	£7.02m

*Gross to 25 March

good weather than is the case with teen titles," says Gardiner, who adds that a March release date can now be a big risk in the UK, especially when targeting a demographic that seems to prefer their gardens to darkened rooms. "We felt safer releasing in late February," says Gardiner, "but we've taken a few hits along the way. Sunshine in March is almost becoming the norm."

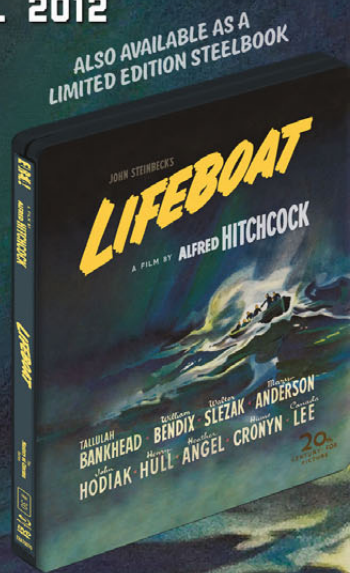
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Life during wartime

Like so many films by the great Yugoslavian director Aleksandar Petrovic, 'Group Portrait with Lady' is off the radar. By Vlastimir Sudar

In the mid-1990s, a friend asked me to help track down the films of Aleksandar Petrovic (1929-1994), who had recently died, to screen at a possible retrospective in London. Petrovic was one of the greatest Yugoslav directors, best known for his influential and internationally acclaimed drama *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (*Skupljaci perja*, 1967); since at that time in the 90s armed conflict was tearing Yugoslavia apart, perhaps the idea was to show the country in a different light from the then ubiquitous press coverage. While seeking out the films, I discovered for the first time that Petrovic had made a film outside Yugoslavia, the German/French co-production *Group Portrait with Lady* (*Gruppenbild mit Dame*, 1977). It's a film that has haunted me ever since.

Group Portrait with Lady is an adaptation of the epic German novel that many believe played a key role in winning its writer Heinrich Böll the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1972. Like his other frequently adapted fellow countryman Günter Grass, Böll believed that a writer should operate as the conscience of his nation, and he never flinched from probing the most sensitive issues residing in its collective psyche – the rise of Nazism in the 1930s being the most obvious one. In his voluminous novel Böll explores the period from the rise of fascism to the mid-1960s, when Germany was at the height of its economic boom. Following several key characters, the writer finds some of the roots of fascism in what he sees as the repressively dogmatic culture of the Catholic church; more importantly, however, he emphasises that the spirit powering the post-war economic boom and rapacious capitalist expansion was the same spirit Nazism thrived on.

It was clear to Böll, who collaborated on the script with the Petrovic, that the novel would have to be severely abridged for the screen. Petrovic took charge here, turning this into a World War II story focusing on young German woman Leni Gruyten (played by the Austrian-born star of French cinema, Romy Schneider) and her affairs with two soldiers during the war. In the pre-credits prologue to the film, Petrovic rescues one 1930s episode from the novel, set in the Catholic convent



Across borders: the multinational cast includes Romy Schneider, left, and Brad Dourif

where young Leni was schooled and then expelled. He also sets the final scene in 1960s Germany – the main part of the film is one long flashback narrated by Leni's wartime employer (played by another stalwart of French cinema, Michel Galabru).

Petrovic was criticised for including these brief snippets of the 1930s and the 1960s, which were seen as unnecessary appendixes inadvertently left hanging. But the director was a modernist who didn't subscribe to the idea of fixed endings in his work; in this instance, too, he perhaps wanted to provide a framework for his group portrait of wartime Germany. Following the source novel, the rise of Nazism and the economic boom were the necessary bookends to the story.

The film's portrayal of wartime Germany differs markedly from the usual stereotypes. Leni's first boyfriend Erhard, an officer in German army, and his younger brother Heinrich have nothing but a profound contempt for the Nazis

Romy Schneider effortlessly embodies Lena's confident persona

and their vision of Germany. The two of them decide to escape to Sweden, but fail and are shot as deserters. Leni's father, a rich industrialist, is exposed as a saboteur of the Reich, and promptly dispatched to a concentration camp. Leni, facing financial ruin, starts working at the local florist, busy making wreaths for dead German soldiers. As the shop can't handle the demand, a Russian prisoner of war is brought to help out: Boris, a bespectacled young engineer who speaks fluent German (played by the American actor Brad Dourif). Slowly, Boris and Leni fall for each other, and she secures a fake German ID for him. But as Americans enter the city, Boris is arrested as a German

soldier, and dies in a French prisoner-of-war camp.

Petrovic directs the story as a low-key chamber piece, creating a quietly languid atmosphere, particularly in the scenes at the florist – albeit an atmosphere overshadowed by ominous events outside. Only in one scene does he throw down the gauntlet, foregrounding the war and revealing the film as a high-budget affair. Allied bombardments provide the spectacle as the city's buildings are torn apart, but it's a rapid montage of the overexposed faces of those who are bombed that's most affecting – bringing home the horrors of the war in the most immediate way.

As Leni, Romy Schneider effortlessly embodies the character's confident persona, which only slips during her breakdown in a bombed-out shelter. Brad Dourif – fresh from his breakthrough role in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) for another itinerant East European, Milos Forman – is also convincing as an intelligent and educated Russian, cautiously coy in a hostile environment. With Galabru and New German Cinema regular Rüdiger Vogler in supporting roles, the stellar international cast shows that this was a major arthouse affair, not without a whiff of Europudding about it. But Petrovic's use of a multinational cast also has a point, expanding the book's notion that wars between nations are futile affairs, since nations themselves are fragile constructs – the film ends with a Russian buried in a German grave. So it's a shame the Petrovic retrospective we researched never materialised, as screening this anti-war film by a Yugoslav director would have been all too timely in the mid-1990s, as his country fell apart.

Group Portrait with Lady premiered in Cannes in 1977, but is now completely unavailable, while all of Petrovic's films remain very hard to come by even in his native Serbia. This is mainly because one of the largest studios of Socialist Yugoslavia – Avala Film in Belgrade, which produced his home-grown films – has been teetering on the edge of bankruptcy since the break-up of the country, and its precious back-catalogue seems to be forgotten.

Group Portrait, however, is not in that treasure trove – in fact it had backing from United Artists. Considering its A-list arthouse cast, its disappearance below the radar is perplexing – all the more so since the frank manner in which it deals with the greatest tragedy of the 20th century makes it a searing reminder of the futility of armed conflicts.

What the papers said



"It's appropriate that this portrait of the German war tragedy be done by a foreign helmer, not by a native one – for critical repercussions might possibly outweigh the integrity of the theme, and a backlash could result... Credits are top-notch, particularly Pierre-William Glenn's lensing of the greenhouse to lend

mood and atmosphere to the main line of story. Performance by Romy Schneider is a good cut above her usual star status... Galabru as the greenhouse proprietor steals some scenes, but it's he who gives the story its unity by drawing all the characters together. Dourif is more than credible as the starving Russian POW. United Artists may have a critical winner at Cannes."
'Variety', 21 May 1977

Park City hits the big city

Films from Robert Redford's Sundance festival are set to screen at London's O2 arena.

By **Geoffrey Macnab**

It'll be a case of Park City, Utah, on the Thames when Robert Redford's Sundance Institute holds its first Sundance London Film and Music Festival (26-29 April) at the O2 Arena in Greenwich. The idea, according to Sundance director John Cooper, is to give the London audiences a "cross-section of what the offering is in Utah every year". Fourteen films from last January's Sundance Festival will receive their British premieres at the O2. These include documentaries as well as fictional features and films (as Cooper puts it) from both "the more experimental side and the glossier, more acceptable side". The varied treats in store range from *Chasing Ice*, Jeff Orlowski's documentary about photographing glaciers, to *Filly Brown*, a hip-hop movie about a young Mexican girl's rise to fame.

It would be stretching a point to suggest that Sundance London has been conceived as part of an export drive on behalf of US independent



Stage struck: 'Filly Brown' follows a young Mexican girl's rise to fame as a hip-hop artist in Los Angeles

cinema. Nonetheless, of the 14 titles, only a handful have UK distributors. Without this initiative from Sundance, they would almost certainly never have surfaced in the UK. In spite of film-industry folklore about distributors bidding millions of dollars for Sundance titles and the likes of *Reservoir Dogs*, *Shine* and *The Blair Witch Project* being discovered in Park City, the truth is that much US indie cinema simply doesn't travel abroad.

The inspiration for Sundance London came from Redford himself. "This is all his idea. He is very involved and I think he will be there the whole time," says Cooper. "It's something we've been talking about for a long time. Forward in our brain is always thinking about what next for American Independent film. How can we support it better and expand? We want to create more opportunities for filmmakers." Asked who the festival is aimed at, Cooper replies: "First and foremost, London cinemagoers. I am curious to see how much of the real cinephile audience we get." He says the facilities at the O2 are "much more suited to a film festival than Park City ever was and ever will be". The Cineworld offers state-of-the-art screening facilities.

The O2 is run by the Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), one of the world's most aggressive owners and promoters of sports and entertainment venues. The festival can only help boost AEG's profile and

The truth is that much US indie cinema simply doesn't travel abroad

cultural credentials. But the challenge for the organisers is to attract sizeable audiences to see US independent movies that don't have star names or big budgets. That's one reason why the new festival is as much about music and debate as it is about movies – and (one guesses) why Redford's participation is being highlighted. One event will feature Redford in conversation with revered American songwriter and producer T-Bone Burnett (British author Nick Hornby is moderating the discussion, which is about "the art of bringing music and film together"). London band Placebo will be in concert and Tricky will be performing material from his debut album *Maxinquaye* with singer Martina Topley-Bird, for the first time in 15 years.

Some of the films on show – notably Joe Berlinger's documentary *Under African Skies*, about the making of Paul Simon's *Graceland*, and Dylan Southern and Will Lovelace's film about LCD Soundsystem, *Shut up and Play the Hits* – are also music-themed. The prominence of documentaries in the programme is a Sundance characteristic, explains director of programming Trevor Groth: "That is driven by Redford. He has always

had a passion for documentary. That has been a strength of ours over the years. I think Sundance has helped put cinematic documentaries on the map all over the world, especially in the US."

What Sundance London won't have is an industry component. The sales agents and buyers who descend on Park City in their thousands every January aren't expected in Greenwich in late April. But as Groth points out, the organisers want to collaborate with the local industry when they can. They're encouraging UK distributors to use Sundance London to launch independent films like Julie Delpy's *2 Days in New York* and Josh Radnor's *Liberal Arts* in the UK.

One potential pitfall faced by the festival is the long journey from Central London to Greenwich. But as Groth points out, The O2 gets "huge turnouts for their arena shows. We are hoping that people will come out there and go see a film, go see a panel, go see a concert – they'll make a day and night of it."

The organisers aren't making any commitments beyond this year, but they hint that they might soon want to travel yet further afield. Could the event in London inspire forays to other European cities – a Sundance Rome or a Sundance Paris? "It could be," Cooper muses. "I know that American filmmakers would love to go to all those places – as would I!"

■ The Sundance London Film and Music Festival runs from 26 to 29 April



Live action: 'Shut up and Play the Hits'



Two's company: 'Liberal Arts'



Simon says: 'Under African Skies'

Lights, camera, reaction

Mark Cousins reflects on audience feedback to his epic 15-hour documentary *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*

At the end of August last year, I worked 90-hour weeks to finish *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* in time for screening at the Telluride Film Festival, on the UK television channel More 4 and at the Toronto International Film Festival. Back then we had no idea what the reaction to the 15-hour film would be. We were a tiny, exhausted team, trying to tell an epic story on a small budget, bracing ourselves for impact. Seven months later, a picture has emerged of how audiences, programmers, educators, distributors and the film industry have responded.

Audiences first. I've done about 50 question-and-answer sessions to date, and some comments have recurred: after seeing clips of films from Africa, China in the 1930s, India in the 1950s etc, many people have said: "I thought I knew about movies, but now I have a lot more to see." This is what I've come to think of as the 'Rumsfeldian response': knowing what you don't know. Lots of people tell me that their favourite filmmaker (ie Preston Sturges) isn't in it. Some people have problems with my voice (I speak the commentary, which runs to 500 pages). In MoMA in New York (where the film ran for 18 days), one guy said that *TSOF* should have been narrated by Morgan Freeman. "Oh don't be so STUPID!" yelled a scary old lady in response, and I burst out laughing. As *TSOF* is neither centred on America nor about stardom, an American movie-star narrator would be wrong.

People in Q&As also say that *TSOF* is too personal. My response is that while its details are subjective (others would have chosen different films and scenes), it's structurally more objective than many film histories, which often privilege films from where the writer or filmmaker lives. I tried to avoid such evaluative myopia by making sure my account of, say, Iranian or Ethiopian cinema was not too blurred. But would I have included Humphrey Jennings, for example, if I had been Korean or Japanese? I doubt it. So, yes, it's subjective too.

.....
One guy told me it should have been narrated by Morgan Freeman, not me
.....



Behind the scenes: Cousins, in kilt, shooting *'The Story of Film: An Odyssey'* in China

What has surprised me is that *TSOF* is a 'grower'. It was screened in a gallery space in Telluride. We expected people to stay ten minutes, but many were there for five hours or more (some compared the experience to seeing Christian Marclay's *The Clock*). In MoMA, the film ended up filling their biggest screen (420 seats). Superbowl fans missed the annual game so that they could see the end of our film. The audience grew.

This touched me, of course, but more moving still has been the emergence, in audience discussions, of the idea of 'a life in movies'. Older people in particular have often said, "I've been watching films all my life" or "I look back at my life and see so much moviegoing", and *TSOF* seems to remind them of that, perhaps because in it we see movies themselves grow up.

Programmers and festival directors have had to work out how to show a 15-hour film. The pattern was set by Toronto: three hours a day for five days, then a marathon over two days. The Berlinale did the marathon, Palm Springs did both, Dubai did the daily. In every case, temporary

communities have formed. In Palm Springs, a woman designed a certificate for me to sign for everyone who saw the whole film. Everywhere, group photos are taken at the end. People bring and share food. We've loved these things, which remind me of the small festivals I do with Tilda Swinton. Some festivals have left just five or ten minutes' break for food in an eight-hour screening, but we're delighted that others are talking about leaving space for people to cook together if they like, to turn the screening into a social weekend.



My life in film: Mark Cousins

I've heard a lot from teachers and lecturers around the world. They've said things like "this is what we have been waiting for" – a kind of visual tasting menu for world cinema that can be shown to undergraduates, but also help teachers teach themselves. This is crucial, I think. Many teachers have not benefited from an education in world cinema and so, even when they want to, they're not fully able to pass such learning on.

Though *TSOF* is told from a resolutely non-industry perspective, it's been pleasing that a lot of filmmakers have seen it on the big screen or watched it on TV. I've had a number of "I'm proud to be in it" emails, and was pleasantly surprised to hear that two of Hollywood's most famous producers had their assistants phone up to ask for a copy of it on DVD. We tried to make something that would remind filmmakers (including us) why we are in cinema in the first place ("like a fish is in water," according to the French critic Serge Daney).

Slightly more problematic has been IMDb's billing of *TSOF* as a TV series, just because they saw it on TV. We hope it works well on the small screen, but it was shot and cut for the big screen as well. My producer John Archer and I have pointed this out to IMDb, but they seem to think that they have the right to decide what it is. So many people around the world use IMDb that it influences how the work is perceived.

Finally there's the question of the reaction to *TSOF* from other countries. The book on which the film is based was pretty widely published (and translated into Mandarin, Dutch, Danish, Spanish, Portuguese etc). But, maybe because we have a very good sales agent (HanWay), the film is going wider still, and has been bought by Studio Canal for France and Germany, for example. Neither country published the book.

So it's been a tiring, fascinating seven months. My reaction to all these reactions has been, at times, to run for cover into the creative world that I know better, so I have made a new film, *A Diary of Three Days of Mexican Forays*. I shot it in three days rather than six years, and it cost £10. But it's feature-length, and I've just sent it out in rough cut. Now, to come full circle, I am waiting for reactions.

■ *'The Story of Film: An Odyssey'* is out on DVD on 23 April. The launch will take place at the BFI Southbank, London, on 16 April. Mark Cousins will present extracts and be in conversation with Nick James

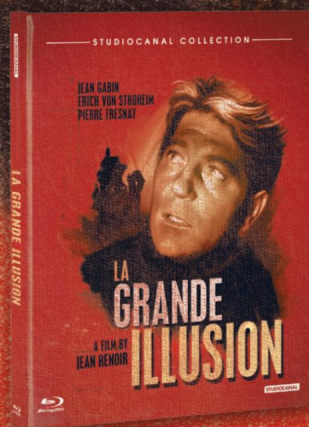
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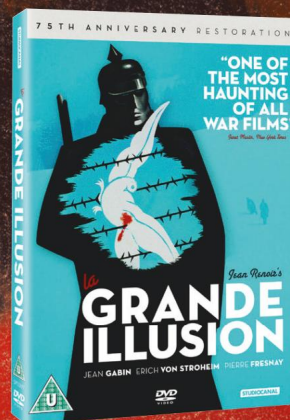
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So near, so far

When I was ten, my uncle Harold gave me a fountain pen – a thing of beauty which completely changed the way I wrote. It even changed my handwriting, which clearly needed to evolve to the point where it deserved this gorgeous piece of technology. Strangely enough, all I can really remember about the pen itself is its taste: created in the pre-plastic era and, like old telephones, made of bakelite, it had a cool, slightly oily flavour. But while images of the pen itself have faded from my mind, I clearly recall the sense of connection between hand, pen and paper as I used it. This was real writing, which put an end to the era of crayon scrawls and comments of “That’s lovely, darling. What is it?”

Writing was different. Writing linked you to the grown-up world and its codes – in this case, the written word. Over time I graduated to a manual typewriter, an electric typewriter and, finally, a word processor. And at each stage I have become more detached from what I was writing. It’s amazing, really, that the phrase ‘put pen to paper’ is still in relatively common use. Surely it can’t outlast the decade: the primary-school children interviewed by Lucy Mangan on a recent BBC Radio 4 programme were pretty sure that, before long, everyone would have tablet computers to write on. Maybe not even that: maybe they’d just speak and the tablet would convert what they said into perfect text, robbing traditionalists of their eternal complaint about bad handwriting and bad spelling, both banished by the flick of a microchip.

At each stage along this route, however, writing has become less tactile, and what is written gets further away from the act of writing. As I sit here at my desktop computer, my eyes flick back and forth between the keyboard and the screen (ever since Apple produced the new, smaller keyboard, my touch-typing confidence has deserted me). I am now more disconnected from my words than I have ever been. This must affect the way I write, both mechanically (instead of pen to paper, it’s now fingers to keyboard to cable to USB plug to microchip to screen) and in terms of style.

My relationship with moving images, on the other hand – which is what this column is really about – has gone in exactly the opposite direction. In the early days I was taken – and later, went of my own accord – to a certain cinema at a certain time to see a scheduled film.



I clearly recall the connection between hand, pen and paper, which put an end to the era of crayon scrawls and comments of “That’s lovely, darling. What is it?”

Let’s call this cinema as Event – a cultural ritual that still survives at film festivals. There, though, time has in a sense been reversed. As a child, my mother would decide the film (hence my uncool but undying love of *Giant*); now it’s the festival programmer who does so. In Cannes, I don’t go to see a film chosen from an available list: I go to see ‘the 8.30’ – an early-morning screening of a film someone else chose. Often I’ve forgotten what it is until it starts (and sometimes forgotten what it was as soon as it’s over). This is not so much Event as Guided Tour – a cultural coach trip for which someone else has chosen the itinerary. If it’s Tuesday, this must be Almodóvar.

There are, of course, still traces of the Event: the place (the Grand Théâtre Lumière), the time (don’t be late), the perfect screen, the flawless projection, the peerless sound. In the rest of my life, however, the cinema-as-event period – preserved for a while during my generation’s classic *Pariscopes* phase, as we chased down a missed classic in some outlying Parisian fleapit – has gradually been undermined, with the first step taken when I realised I could chase down missed classics on TV (in the days when BBC2 still showed foreign films with regularity and discernment). Next came VHS, whose bleached-out fuzziness somehow reflected the Britain of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Then things began to speed up: DVD, Blu-ray, HD, downloads...

What’s interesting is that at each stage – unlike with writing – I actually come closer to the film, no longer a sacred object worshipped in

a specially built black box but something I can stop, rewind, slow-forward, reframe. With a little bit more technology, I could recut it, mash it up, remix it, manipulate it any number of ways, its sacred inviolability long gone. I could even change its meaning completely, as do the Moon Nazis in the very funny *Iron Sky*, who turn *The Great Dictator* from a feature-length satire on fascism into “the greatest short film ever made”, portraying a playful *Führer*.

At this point, what we used to (and indeed still do) call ‘film’ has become just another series of moving images vying for our attention in a world saturated with such things. Once the exclusive domain of the cinema, the moving image is now the foremost currency of our time, bombarding us from phones, laptops, shops and escalators, set free from the exclusive embrace of the movies.

I wish I could end on a triumphant solution, rescuing the medium we all love (or we wouldn’t be reading this magazine) before it’s diluted by the digital flood. All I can say is: this dilution has brought a unique and bracing freedom. Helped by festivals (which still strive to be events), repertory cinemas, curation of any kind, we now create our own events. And perhaps, like the taste of that childhood pen, they will be all the more meaningful for being our own experience, for we each need to negotiate our own individual relationship with the screen, whatever its size, resolution or degree of portability. What could be more exciting? ♦♦ Nick Roddick

● **Palestine Film Festival** hosts the UK premiere of Sameh Zoabi’s debut feature, ‘Man Without a Cell Phone’, alongside Susan Sontag’s 1974 film essay on Israel ‘Promised Lands’, Travis Wilkerson’s ‘Sand Creek Equation’ and a new drama from 2004 Cannes prizewinner Tawfik Abu Wael. The festival runs from 20 April to 3 May at the Barbican, London, the School of Oriental and African Studies and University College London.

● **Peter Terson: The Artisan Playwright** presents a selection of the TV work of the writer of some of the most controversial dramas of the 1960s and 70s, including the BBC Play for Today dramas ‘The Fishing Party’ (1972) and ‘Shakespeare or Bust’ (1973). BFI Southbank, London, 4-28 May.

● **‘Moving Walls’** is the title of a new film installation by Polish filmmaker Lech Majewski. The installation draws from four of Majewski’s films, one part of which is based on his most recent feature ‘The Mill & The Cross’ (see DVD review on page 88). Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, London, until 13 May.

● **Terracotta Far East Film Festival** again screens a selection of the most interesting new films from the Far East, among them Japanese director Sono Sion’s ‘Himizu’ and Korean Kang Je-kyu’s ‘My Way’. The event also includes a triple-bill horror night. Prince Charles Cinema, London, 12-15 April.

● **Bradford International Film Festival** again screens a range of new films alongside a tribute to Chuck Jones, a retrospective of actor Pierre Clémenti’s work, and a number of special guests. The festival also marks the 60th anniversary of the invention of Cinerama with a weekend of screenings of five of the ten films ever produced in the three-strip process, and screenings of several 70mm films, including David Lean’s ‘Ryan’s Daughter’ (below) and Ridley Scott’s ‘Black Rain’. The festival runs from 19 to 29 April, culminating in the Widescreen Weekend. National Media Museum, Bradford.



Though he never matched the fecundity of a Fassbinder or Ruiz, in the 1980s and 1990s Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki used to make at least one feature every year, and sometimes more. But the gaps have been widening: the silent film *Juha* (1999) was followed by *The Man Without a Past* (*Mies vailla menneisyyttä*, 2002), *Lights in the Dusk* (*Laitakaupungin valot*, 2006) and now *Le Havre*, which finally emerges in Britain nearly a year after its 2011 Cannes premiere. As soon as the film begins, however, it's as though he's never been away.

True, *Le Havre* features some superficial departures from the director's earlier work: it's set in France, one of the central characters is a Gabonese child, and its major theme is illegal immigration. But from the opening scene we've clearly returned to what his regular female lead Kati Outinen has called "Akiland": a dingy outpost of Europe populated by fatalistic stoics whose poker faces don't quite conceal immensely warm hearts. Outinen herself is a reassuringly familiar presence as Arletty (whose name is one of many conscious nods to classic French cinema), the wife of itinerant shoeshiner Marcel Marx (André Wilms, another Kaurismäki veteran). After she

is unexpectedly hospitalised, he not only has to fend for himself but also has to decide what to do with Gabonese refugee Idrissa (Blondin Miguel), who turns up unannounced and on the run from the law – embodied by Jean-Pierre Darroussin's marvellously hangdog Inspector Monet.

Seasoned Kaurismäki fans (and, no doubt, a few beginners) will easily second-guess almost every narrative development, but that's a very minor quibble when almost every scene is so saturated with incidental pleasures. In any case, it's scarcely a novel quibble with this particular filmmaker; in fact he addressed this point near the start of our interview, which was conducted in a chilly January on an outdoor balcony overlooking Soho – one of the few places where he could still legally smoke. Very conscious of the prevailing wind, and fearing a recording catastrophe, I pressed my iPhone into service alongside my usual voice recorder, and this led naturally to the first question.

Michael Brooke: In 'Le Havre', the mobile phone is literally an instrument of the Devil, isn't it?

Aki Kaurismäki: Yes.

MB: It's a wonderful moment: you recognise Jean-Pierre Léaud, and then...

AK: Yes, I like the idea that he was in Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cent Coups*, and he was 20 years old and

hunted. I show him 50 years later – and now he's an informer. That's what society does to you.

MB: I imagine character names like Arletty and Dr Becker are not coincidental in their reference to great figures in French cinema.

AK: They were the only names I knew.

MB: A character named Marcel Marx appeared in your 1992 film 'La Vie de bohème', and André Wilms plays him again here. Is he the same character?

AK: Yes, I saved some trouble because I wouldn't have to invent a new character. I had one in the pocket. Everybody is repeating themselves, so it should be all right for me too, and it's ecological. Everybody has one story and they're making variations of it. That's what makes it interesting, how the variations change during the years. If you're polite, you call it style. The directors who change all the time, they're called professionals. I wonder how come they are professionals if they have no style.

MB: One variation in 'Le Havre' is that a lot of your earlier films ended with the characters emigrating, whereas this time they start as immigrants.

AK: I am an immigrant myself [Kaurismäki now lives in Portugal]. I used to send the characters out of the country, but after I left Finland myself, I let the characters in.

MB: As an immigrant yourself, was this a subject you'd ➡

Since leaving his native Finland, Aki Kaurismäki has broadened his canvas to embrace the plight of refugees in the French port of 'Le Havre'. But his lugubrious vision – and deadpan interview manner – remain unchanged, finds Michael Brooke

MINOR QUAY



THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

In 'Le Havre', the new film from writer-director Aki Kaurismäki, opposite, Marcel Marx (André Wilms, standing) decides to help African refugee Idrissa (Blondin Miguel)





DREAMS OF ESCAPE
Kaurismäki's interest in the immigrant plight of Idrissa coincides with the director's own recent experience, having left Finland for Portugal

◀ wanted to film for a long time? Presumably you didn't go to Portugal in a packing case...

AK: No, I just wanted to get out of Finland.

MB: So there was never any chance of making a story like 'Le Havre' in Finland?

AK: Nobody is so desperate that they want to be a refugee in Finland. Apart from gypsies who have been begging in the streets of Helsinki – and the whole country is in a mess, because they don't know what to do. Because they are a democracy and they can't just kill them, they try to push them away somewhere in a Nordic way, which means that nothing's done and they are in misery, because it's a Nordic social-democrat country.

MB: Which is one of the themes of 'The Man Without a Past', isn't it?

AK: Yes.

MB: Talking of recurring themes, Chang in 'Le Havre' (played by Vietnamese-born Quoc-Dung Nguyen) is somebody who's also consciously erased his past. He's not so much without one entirely, but he knows that it has no value any more.

AK: He's an interesting actor. I found him in a Swiss film, and I found out in the middle of shooting that he's not an actor, he's an electrician. But I liked his face so much: his smile could light a whole city. He was one of the 'boat people'. He was four years old, and his bigger sister put him in a boat and after four months he ended up in Switzerland. So he knows how to survive.

MB: Where did you find Blondin Miguel, the boy who plays the Gabonese refugee Idrissa?

AK: We checked all the Paris schools, and I had five who I liked, but I had to choose. There was something in him. Never two takes with him – only with professionals.

MB: You're not very fond of doing more than one take, are you?

AK: No, not really. I am the producer, so I want to save. I'm under budget all the time, because I understand the producer's side.

MB: I was impressed to see that Laïka the dog got an opening credit in 'Le Havre' along with the actors.

AK: She stole the show. And since I am the producer, I always use my own dogs. They're cheap. I have to feed them anyway.

MB: And you're their agent as well?

AK: No, my wife is. So it's tough negotiation. When I start to write the screenplay, always on the third day my wife comes and says: "Is there any part for a dog?" She's a good manager. And the dogs always remember their dialogue. The actors always don't. I mean, the other actors.

MB: I always thought the donkey in 'Au hasard, Balthazar' gave one of the best performances in any Bresson film.

AK: I know – in this most optimistic comedy called *Au hasard, Balthazar*.

MB: Talking of optimism, every time I meet you or see an interview with you, I sense a generally pessimistic outlook on life, and yet at the same time you've staged some of the most radiantly happy endings of any films in the last 20 years.

AK: And in this one, two happy endings.

MB: Yes, the cherry blossom!

AK: Nobody ever made two happy endings in one happy comedy, so it had to be done. Even if it needed a miracle. Miracles do happen, but not for mankind, I'm afraid.

MB: No, it's all about individual miracles, isn't it?

AK: Individuals are miracles, societies are not.

MB: In some parts of Greece they've returned to old-fashioned barter and local co-operatives.

AK: That's what everybody will have to do quite soon, because societies are collapsing. In Portugal they are still considering what will happen. The economic destruction hasn't hit Portugal

'Nobody is so desperate that they want to be a refugee in Finland. Apart from gypsies'

at its full yet. But it will, quite soon. If you pay for lunch, five euros last year, it's now four euros, next year maybe three euros, if you want to survive. Because of the European Union and the IMF and the World Bank, the stupid way of killing what is still to be killed. But if they kill everybody, who will pay the taxes? I think the politicians and especially the economists are far away from reality, and they don't know in which pocket they put the money. In the short term it's wise, but in the long term it's very stupid because at the moment there's no money to put in anybody's pocket.

MB: Talking of things changing, the screening of 'Le Havre' I went to the other day was the first time I'd ever seen one of your films digitally projected. But you're still shooting on 35mm, aren't you?

AK: I shall die with my boots on, but I'm a bit worried because since Kodak is gone, I will have to start deep-freezing material over the next few years.

MB: Do you still use Ingmar Bergman's old camera?

AK: I'm a bit tired of this question – I shot 17 films with that camera and Bergman three, so it's my camera!

Bergman was the original pessimist. In the late 70s, somebody asked him about his political attitude and he said: "I think that behind the corner there's an ant society, otherwise I'd be a social democrat." How come he saw it in the 70s? I think it's clear now that we live in an ant society.

MB: But most of your characters still believe in basic human decency.

AK: Individuals yes, societies no. But I have become more and more optimistic during the years, because the hope is gone.

MB: Your films are dealing with darker subjects – unemployment, mental illness and horrible human exploitation – but at the same time they also seem to be getting happier.

AK: I think if people buy the ticket to go to the cinema, I have no heart anymore to get them leaving the cinema sadder than when ➡

THE MAN WITH A PAST

Leningrad cowboys, London hitmen and many depressed Finns... **Michael Brooke** surveys the Kaurismäki back catalogue

Interviewing Aki Kaurismäki about his earlier work is something of a minefield: he's not so much self-deprecating as self-excoriating. A personal tribute to one of his major influences began with the Finnish director addressing a picture of Ozu with the words: "I've made 11 lousy films and it's all your fault." In Jonathan Ross's delicious 1991 Channel 4 profile, Kaurismäki described his 1987 film *Hamlet Goes Business* (*Hamlet liikemassailmassa*) as "not a very funny comedy – it's quite an unfunny comedy" and claimed that the most fitting reception for *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989) was "maybe a bullet in the head".

But to those with a less polemically jaundiced eye, his is one of the most accomplished and coherent bodies of work of any European filmmaker to emerge since the 1970s. After cutting his teeth on the films of his older brother Mika (including a surprisingly garrulous lead performance in 1981's *The Liar*), Kaurismäki aimed precociously high with his solo directing debut *Crime and Punishment* (*Rikos ja rangaistus*, 1983). Although he admitted that this was far too ambitious, it nonetheless demonstrates that his mature aesthetic was visible from the start, from the documentary-like treatment of the protagonist's slaughterhouse job to the actors' seemingly blank-faced yet oddly expressive performances.

His second feature *Calamari Union* (1985) was his first overt comedy, and it anticipates many of the later ones. Shot in black and white, and idiosyncratically dedicated to "those ghosts of Baudelaire, Michaux and Prévert who still hover on this earth", it revolves around 14 shades-wearing hipsters named Frank (and a 15th called Pekka) who attempt to relocate to a more salubrious part of Helsinki, where "the air is smooth and fresh". Most die in the attempt.

Known variously as the 'Proletarian Trilogy' or the 'Loser Trilogy', *Shadows in Paradise* (*Varjoja paratiisissa*, 1986), *Ariel* (1988) and *The Match Factory Girl* (*Tulitikkutehtaan tyttö*, 1990) saw Kaurismäki establishing and refining his most familiar theme: the struggle of working-class men and women to cope in a society where they're marginalised at every turn, not least thanks to their shyness and passivity. The protagonists of the first two films end up emigrating, while the matchfactory girl wreaks a stealthy but deadly revenge on her tormentors in what remains Kaurismäki's most ruthlessly focused film to date. Two films apiece feature Kati Outinen and Matti Pellonpää, Kaurismäki's favourite interpreters until the latter's premature death in 1995.

Pellonpää also acted in Kaurismäki's broader comedies, notably as the sadistically unreasonable Vladimir, manager of a Soviet-era polka-turned-rock 'n' roll band whose members



ROAD TO NOWHERE
'Ariel', above, and 'Shadows in Paradise', top, made up two thirds of Kaurismäki's early 'Proletarian Trilogy', also known as the 'Loser Trilogy'

stand out more for their elongated quiffs and winkle-pickers than the quality of their musicianship. *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989) and *Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses* (1994) saw them traversing small-town America and post-Soviet Europe, playing indifferently received gigs along the way. A far more enthusiastic reception greeted their (genuine) 1993 Helsinki concert, a pairing with the Alexandrov Red Army Chorus that was both spectacularly absurd and a strangely moving reminder that Finland and Russia share a lengthy border. Kaurismäki immortalised it in *Total Balalaika Show* (1994).

I Hired a Contract Killer (1990) – Kaurismäki's only British-made film, in which he effortlessly absorbed the drabber parts of North London into his universe – is a thriller concerning a depressive (Jean-Pierre Léaud) who hires a hitman to bump him off, but then changes his mind after falling in love with an almost unrecognisably low-key Margi Clarke. He returned to Finland for *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatiana* (*Pidä huivista kiinni, Tatjana*, 1994), which follows two painfully shy Finnish men through their country's rural backwaters in the company of two talkative women from Estonia and Kazakhstan – a journey that involves many awkward silences in various bars.

Alongside these original stories, Kaurismäki also tackled further literary adaptations, each drawn from already much-exploited sources, and filmed in black and white. *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987) turns Shakespeare's troubled prince into the majority shareholder in a firm about to be taken over by a rubber-duck manufacturer, one of whose products cheerfully bobs across the screen after Outinen's Ofelia drowns herself in the bath. *La Vie de bohème* (1992) was based on Henri Murger's novel (best known as the source for Puccini's opera *La Bohème*) – and introduced French actor André Wilms to the Kaurismäki repertory company as one of three raffish would-be artists scraping an existence in a clearly present-day Paris which nonetheless has only just discovered the avant-garde paintings of Malevich. *Juha* (1999), meanwhile, was the fourth screen version of Juhani Aho's novel, and the second silent one. Anticipating *The Artist* by a dozen years, it achieved the merest fraction of that film's profile.

Much more accessible in every sense, the 'Finland Trilogy' of *Drifting Clouds* (1996), *The Man Without a Past* (2002) and *Lights in the Dusk* (2006) saw a return to the territory of the earlier trilogy, in which fatalistic narratives about unemployment, amnesia and exploitation are resolved in surprisingly upbeat fashion – although the 'happy ending' of the last film consists of its only genuine gesture of affection, taking place literally in the final second before the credits roll.

◀ they come in. I want them happier when they go out, which is some value for their money. Don't tell anybody, but I have a tender heart. At least I did when I still had a heart.

MB: You're obviously a big fan of classic French cinema.

AK: If I had shot this in Italy, I would be a big fan of Italian cinema. I even smuggled some neorealism into this, but also there was a neorealist period in French cinema which is mostly in the shadow of Italian neorealism, because it was more clear in Italy. But in French cinema before the war there was the same cinema, a kind of neorealism.

MB: The Popular Front films?

AK: Yes, very optimistic – and very pessimistic after the war. Europe has just recovered from the First World War, which was a crime against humanity, and had just started to be optimistic, and then came the last bullet, which was the Second World War, which was so insane. And then everything was rebuilt again, and then came the Cold War, which took 30 years, and no reason either. And all of this was because of money.

MB: Money and mutual paranoia about what the other side thinks.

AK: Money built the paranoia because it was good for the money.

MB: I remember the bit in 'The Man Without a Past' when North Korea takes over a Finnish bank.

AK: Yes. Which happened.

MB: You've already made two trilogies about working-class life. Is 'Le Havre' the first in a third?

AK: I just say that because I have to say something. And I am so lazy that if I don't have some kind of false plans, then I don't do anything. If I talk about a trilogy, my subconscious starts to build one. If I didn't have this kind of illusion I wouldn't do anything, which would be good for everybody.

MB: Do you ever plan to make a film in Portugal?

AK: No, it's my home. And I like to be there totally as a gardener.

MB: The Finnish media seem to have been quite nice about 'Le Havre'.

AK: They are more complimentary than I want them to be. It's a balance of horror between me and the media. I used to be a journalist in my younger days, so I know how the machine works. So I am very hard to beat in Finland, because I can always have my revenge, maybe 20 years later. This is a thing which happens only in small societies, where more or less everybody knows everybody and everybody remembers everything. Luckily I am not from Iceland. In Soho there are more people than Iceland – 250,000 people, and everyone [in Iceland] has a long memory. Everybody is somebody's cousin, at least.

MB: Your first feature back in 1983 was an adaptation of 'Crime and Punishment'. There's an echo of Dostoevsky in 'Le Havre' too, in the character of Inspector Monet.

AK: There is, yes, in the scene at the very end where he comes to the home of Marcel Marx. I remember when I wrote it, I wrote the character of [Crime and Punishment's detective] Porfiry Petrovich in this scene, just to amuse myself. Monet reminded me of the good policeman in Dostoevsky's book. He's kind of rebelling. And he hates his boss. Which is a reasonable sign of any worker.

MB: Everyone who's seen 'Le Havre' seems to remember the scene where Inspector Monet spontaneously buys



THE FRUIT IN QUESTION
Inspector Monet (Jean-Pierre Darroussin, seated) contemplates his pineapple in an improvised moment from 'Le Havre'

'It was improvised. I didn't write the character very well, and the pineapple happened to be there'

a pineapple and takes it into the café with him. Was that scene scripted?

AK: It was improvised. I didn't write the character very well, and the pineapple just happened to be there. Then I remembered *Nazarín* – in the last scene he's walking with the pineapple in Calanda, with the drums playing. So it was all channelled from Monsieur Buñuel, who is my hero. I was quite a Buñuel fan in my youth, and I still am. He was the first and the last rebel of cinema.

MB: When Buñuel died, they showed a season of his films on BBC2, which is unimaginable today. Now, anything in a foreign language gets ghettoised.

AK: They don't show anything in black and white, because they're so afraid that they'll lose their advertisers. If you make a film in black and white, you can forget 60 per cent of the audience right away.

MB: And what if you make a film silent too, as you did with 'Juha'?

AK: That was not so commercial an idea, anyway. On the other hand, black and white exists when all the colours have gone.

MB: That's the scary thing about digital filmmaking – people think it's safe and then they find that a few digits are missing for whatever technical reason, and they can't play the film any more.

AK: They're not filmmakers, they're pixel-makers. They have to reinvent their profession. It's a bit horrifying. It was clear ten years ago, but it happened so fast. The magic of cinema is something in the photochemical process which is living in the surface of film. Like flowers and vegetables, everything is based on water and sunshine, and cinema was based on light. And now when the light is gone, it's all an electronic process. And somehow the magic went away. Contrast is perfect, black, white, everything's OK, but the magic has gone. When I do the second part of this trilogy after five years, if I live, where do I get the laboratory? Film archives have laboratories, but where do I get the film? It's really

a shame, and not only for cinema. The common dream has gone.

MB: I think, with very few exceptions, I've seen virtually all your films in 35mm. There were a couple of cases when I couldn't, but I've been very lucky.

AK: I never let people digitise the prints before, but this time I had to do it because the cinemas wouldn't show it [on film]. And in this process I had to check the film print, colour-grade the film print and the digital print. And in many senses the digital print was better because you can control the colours precisely – because in film you are stuck in the old theory that if you want some red, you lose some green – all these compromises you have to deal with. In digital you can do whatever: you can add contrast, you can shadow part of the picture. In a way it's more perfect, but it's dead. Because the photochemical process, which is magic, has vanished.

So cinema from now on will be more or less seen only in festivals. Let's say in five years – no, not even five, three years – commercial cinema is dead. We were lucky to be born when we were. When I was born, 60 per cent of Finns worked in agriculture. Now maybe eight per cent.

MB: Talking of Finns from decades ago, in the UK we're belatedly discovering Teuvo Tulio's films.

AK: Curiously enough, I got a DVD package of [Tulio's] remastered films which I never had a chance to see. I've been watching them now with my video projector, and my cigarette smoke is going through the light. It's the nearest I can get to the cinema, but at least it comes through the light in projection, even if it's digital. If I pass the projector there'll be a shadow on the screen, and it's my shadow.

MB: I know Tulio's style is very different to yours, but was he an influence on your work?

AK: Very much so. And Douglas Sirk too. I'm a melodrama filmmaker, I hope.

MB: Very slow, frozen melodrama.

AK: My melodrama is influenced by Bresson. The first serious film I ever saw was a double bill of *Nanook of the North* and Buñuel's *L'Âge d'or*. If you think of cinema, everything comes between the basic documentary *Nanook* and *L'Âge d'or* – still the wildest film ever made. Everything else is in the middle. So it was a good start.

■ 'Le Havre' is released on 6 April, and is reviewed on page 71

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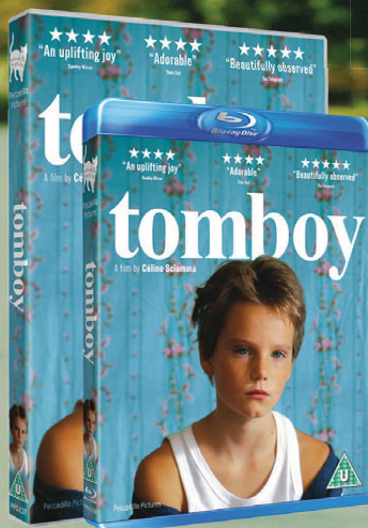
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International Film Guide 2012

the definitive annual review of world cinema
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48th edition

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PUBLISHED IN MARCH

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Reader offers

COMPETITIONS

GRETA GARBO: Five biographies to be won

Biographer David Bret investigates the two so-called missing periods in the life of Greta Garbo in this new book published by The Robson Press. During the 1920s Garbo disappeared for several months, forcing the studio to employ a lookalike. The second time occurred during World War II,

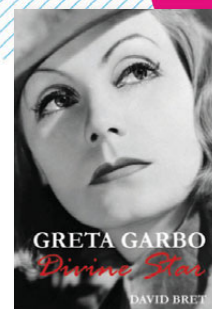
when Garbo was employed by British Intelligence to track down Nazi sympathisers. Bret has acquired previously unsourced material along with anecdotes from friends and colleagues of the star which have never before been published.

We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. What was Garbo's first talkie?

- a. Mata Hari
- b. Grand Hotel
- c. Anna Christie

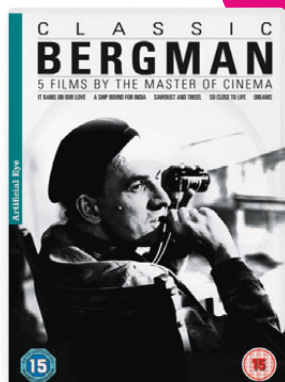


INGMAR BERGMAN: Four classic collections on DVD or Blu-ray to be won

Considered one of Europe's most influential arthouse film directors, Ingmar Bergman's rich body of work reflected on life's fundamental themes. Artificial Eye brings together a selection from two decades of the director's work, covering such subjects as love and childbirth. The films are: *It Rains in Our Love* (1946), *A Ship Bound for India* (1947), *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), *Dreams* (1955) and *So Close to Life* (1958). Extra material includes two documentaries, *The Women and Bergman* and *The Men and Bergman*. We have two collections each on DVD and Blu-ray to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state your preference of edition:

Q. Which actress is in both 'Sawdust and Tinsel' and 'Dreams'?

- a. Bibi Andersson
- b. Harriet Andersson
- c. Eva Dahlbeck



LAS ACACIAS: Five copies of Pablo Giorgelli's film

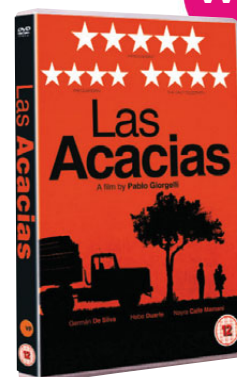
Pablo Giorgelli's *Las Acacias* proved a hit on the festival circuit last year, winning both the Sutherland Award at the London Film Festival and the Camera d'Or at Cannes. A tender road movie, the film tells the story of the unlikely bond that grows between a long-distance lorry driver and the woman and child he agrees to give a lift to as a favour for a friend. The subtle performances from all three characters draw out a poignant and heart-warming story about overcoming loneliness.

We have five copies to give away on DVD or Blu-ray.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state your preference of edition:

Q. To which city in Argentina does Rubén drive in the film?

- a. Buenos Aires
- b. Santa Fe
- c. Mendoza



SCREENWRITING: Five handbooks to be won

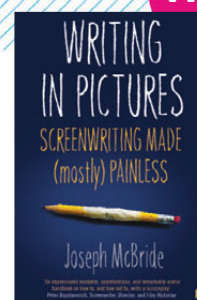
Writing in Pictures, published by Faber and Faber, is a practical, step-by-step guide to writing a screenplay, which avoids the formulaic approach. Screenwriter and film historian Joseph McBride breaks down the process into a series of approachable tasks, and highlights the literary adaptation

as the best way of learning the basics. McBride promises that readers who diligently use the exercises will be well on their way to being professional-quality screenwriters within just a few weeks! We have five copies to give away. To be in with a chance of winning,

please answer the following question:

Q. Which one of these films was both scripted by and adapted from a novel by William Goldman?

- a. All the President's Men
- b. The Stepford Wives
- c. The Princess Bride



HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Bergman Collection', 'Las Acacias', 'Greta Garbo biography' or 'Screenwriting book' in the subject heading, to s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Bergman Collection competition', 'Las Acacias competition', 'Greta Garbo biography competition', or 'Screenwriting Book competition', Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

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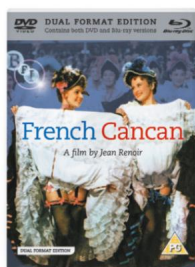
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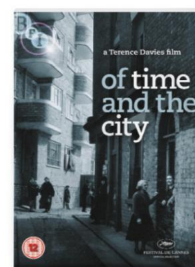
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FRENCH CANCAN
Jean Renoir (1954)
In 1890s Paris, Danglard – mentor and lover of stage stars – discovers a young laundress (Françoise Arnoul) dancing in a nightclub and is inspired to revive the long-forgotten cancan in a show that the whole of Paris will never forget. Based on the true story of Moulin Rouge founder Charles Zidler, this new restoration (presented in dual-format edition) of Jean Renoir's exuberant tale is a masterpiece of Technicolor brilliance. Extras include the documentary 'The Show Must Go On! The Joys of Life by Jean Renoir' (2010).



OF TIME AND THE CITY
Terence Davies (2008)
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British artist-filmmaker Ben Rivers has made a striking feature debut with *'Two Years at Sea'*, a mesmerising portrait of life on the margins. He talks to **Andréa Picard**

A MAN APART

What could possibly appear more strange or uncanny to many of us today than silence, slow action and solitariness? As the world increasingly follows its fervour and civilisation clamours to keep up, irrational timeouts have cultivated our dreams and become the stuff of fantasy. For the past decade, London-based artist-filmmaker Ben Rivers has explored alternate worlds on this very earth via short films and gallery installations that offer up other ways of living and being. With an affection for utopian novels like Sir Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* and Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, and a recurring Ballardian sense of underlying urban dystopia, Rivers has consistently headed for the hills – fertile ground for his imagination, with atmospheric climes and textures ripe for recording on his 16mm Bolex camera.

Fêted internationally for his neo-ethnographic explorations of curious, hermetic existences – such as *Ah, Liberty* (2008) and *Origins of the Species* (2008) – and in some cases vanishing environments, as in *Sack Barrow* (2011), Rivers has successfully extended his signature themes and style into long-form with *Two Years at Sea*,

his mesmerising and award-winning feature debut. Revisiting the forest-dwelling subject of his earlier 14-minute film *This Is My Land* (2006), Rivers observes Jake Williams, who lives alone with his black cat in the woods of Aberdeenshire, entirely off the grid, fulfilling daily rituals that sustain him and his freedom.

While comparisons can and have been made with the films of Argentine auteur Lisandro Alonso (known for his portraits of solitary and strikingly silent men, especially his 2001 debut *La libertad*, with its pared-down cycle of working, eating, shitting and sleeping), *Two Years at Sea* is less concerned with questioning the nature of freedom that attends manual work under an open sky, than with mythic time and the effect of the somewhat strange physical human imprint upon inhabited rural terrain. That Jake is filmed in Scope is unsurprising given Rivers's previous use of the anamorphic lens, most auspiciously in his heady sci-fi featurette *Slow Action* (2010), but here this lone man's navigating of expansive spaces unapologetically conjures the sublime.

Jake is nameless, unidentified and nearly wordless in *Two Years at Sea*. Looking like a cross between a twinkly-eyed Father Time and an ancient Roman bust come to life with wild mane



ARTIST AND MODEL

Ben Rivers, right, filming in the kitchen of Jake Williams, left, whose reclusive Aberdeenshire existence is lovingly chronicled in *'Two Years at Sea'*

and bushy beard, he exists in an undetermined time and place electrified by a protean life force – thrillingly expressed through Rivers's hand-processed, rich and moody monochromatic images – that's completely at odds with today's pace and rampant technological transformations. His is an analogue world, replete with audiocassettes and record player, pen and paper.

Little is revealed about Jake, apart from his amazingly eclectic taste in music (from Indian to Hawaiian honky-tonk and folk), which – in startling counterpoint to the pervasive quiet – is heard blaring from his truck or from the gramophone ingeniously rigged to the facade of his ramshackle house. Jake also has a penchant for quirky interventions into the landscape, such as hoisting a caravan up a tree as a sort of teetering trailer-park Futuro house. His gestures are jittery, joyful, impulsive and determined; the central mystery of his identity is both tempered and fuelled by time-worn photographs that emerge and fill the frame as interstitial transitions or chapter headings between scenes,



telltale signs of a less solitary past.

Despite its attenuated narrative elapsing over a few seasons and its long, lingering takes – some nearing ten minutes as we watch Jake float and fish on a makeshift raft in a neighbouring loch, or fade to black by the dimming light of a campfire – *Two Years at Sea* is far from minimalist. The film itself is buoyed by a generosity of vision, spirit and affectionate humour that obviate austerity and further distinguish it from Alonso's more Bressonian *La libertad*. The pulsating widescreen images hover and surge with electrified meteorological detail, but also with bits of fusain-like dust and goopy watermarks that correspond to the messiness of Jake's heap-filled home.

With several caravans' worth of belongings, in addition to the objects in his house, Jake is a pack rat whose ample, knick-knacky possessions crucially contribute to the film's sculptural nature. With moments reminiscent of Gordon Matta-Clark's filmic architectural cut-outs, *Two Years at Sea* is a portrait of a sentient human being, but one that pays keen attention to the light cast from the forms and objects – and especially windows and walls – that surround Jake and his cat. "You can say as much filming some empty

bottles on a shelf [as] you can hearing Jake talk about living in that place for the last 20 years," Rivers tells me in a phone interview.

After specialising in sculpture and installation at art school, Rivers was initially drawn to film because of his interest in space. "Film could deal with space in a much more satisfying way," he says. "You have more control over how an audience interacts with space and time." His use of the word space is obviously suggestive of the compositional elements and depth of his images, but also holds a more philosophical meaning leading to the fundamental (and age-old) questions about the nature of filmmaking that *Two Years at Sea* aroused during its travels around the international film-festival circuit. "I really wanted to move much more towards a fiction, that space," Rivers explains. "That line that people talk about between fiction and documentary became much more blurry."

Flouting the notion of an objective documentary image, Rivers refuses to provide his film with a label. "It's up to other people to categorise the work," he insists. "So if a documentary festival wants to show it, that's fine by me, but I'm not going to call it a documentary. I'm going to call it cinema. All cinema has

varying levels of construction, and that's what's so interesting about it. I never set out to make a representation of Jake's life. I set out to make a film which is very close to his life, but it's a film that in the end exists for itself. In and for itself. And I think that's a really crucial distinction."

Citing the work of Robert Flaherty, Humphrey Jennings and even the Lumière brothers as examples where fiction and documentary meet and become intertwined, Rivers is less interested in discussing a cinema of the 'in between', though he's very conscious of the fact that much of his work does indeed raise questions about the nature of ethnography, and purposely interrogates the genre. What he will say is that *Two Years at Sea* is "an exaggeration of certain parts of Jake's life", stressing the collaborative working relationship between his subject and himself. Rivers scripted the film, but made alterations whenever Jake felt a task or action would be "out of character". Asked why he chose to go back to Jake when an award from the Film London Artists' Moving Image Network provided the impetus to work on his first feature, Rivers responds: "Jake was the first. Before I made *This Is My Land*, I had never considered making anything even closely resembling a documentary, or something that

involved real people in their actual places. Everything before was constructed or made by myself. He holds a pretty important place in my filmmaking development.”

Setting some rules for himself at the outset, Rivers chose as a challenge to make a feature with a sole character and without dialogue – as a way of creating cinema out of an alternate language in order to “immerse the viewer in a world atmospherically and with a different kind of intellectual engagement... a language of gestures and movements. There’s a language of the objects seen in the film, of space and of the way that space is constructed,” he continues. “You can look at what he’s accumulated and see it as a kind of language built up to portray the person he is. From the things that one surrounds oneself with emerges the language of cinema.”

But this sculptural form and materialist inclination by no means lead to abstraction, as *Two Years at Sea* evinces a genuine intimacy while inviting the wilds of fantasy. Rivers’s references are largely literature-based, among them Doris Lessing, J.G. Ballard and in this case Norwegian author *maudit* Knut Hamsun, whose *Pan* (also the inspiration for Guy Maddin’s 1997 cult classic *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*) provided a starting point for the film’s fiction. But Rivers’s work also shares affinities with the likes of George Kuchar, Chick Strand, Bruce Baillie and Margaret Tait – all fiercely independent cinematic portraitists with singular voices whose films have so brilliantly, and often movingly, summoned the strange from the everyday with an unassumingly precise formal language. One could add Jean Vigo to that august list.

Along with his friend Michael Sippings, Rivers co-founded Brighton’s adventurous Cinematheque, where for ten years the duo delved into programming with a philosophy that celebrated an expansive definition of cinema, adopting a resolutely non-hierarchical approach.

‘You can look at what he’s accumulated and see it as a language built up to portray the person he is’

Any given calendar would mix documentaries with experimental films, silent cinema and works by less-anointed directors like Paul Verhoeven. This ethos of generosity, playfulness and experimentation has unquestionably informed Rivers’s filmmaking. (“It was my film school, in a way,” he says.) While he concedes that his very early work was influenced by the off-kilter and iconoclastic worlds created by Georges Franju, Walerian Borowczyk and Universal horror, he eventually immersed himself in an ocean of film-watching as a way to purge his initial thoughts about what cinema should be. “Suddenly I was watching and showing so much of it that the slate was wiped clean,” he says.

As in his programming, Rivers likes the idea of his work being uncategorisable. He’s resistant to being labelled an experimental filmmaker, even though that’s the term he’s been assigned for obvious reasons – not the least of which is his chosen 16mm medium. There are clear parallels between his subjects and his filmmaking methods, both marginal to the mainstream and remarkably self-sufficient. Rivers wrote, directed, shot and edited *Two Years at Sea*, and even hand-processed the footage in his sink, having cleaned out the world’s supply of Kodak Plus-X, a high-contrast black-and-white stock that was discontinued just as he began filming.

Notwithstanding the sounding of the Plus-X death knell and the recent spate of 16mm lab closures, Rivers remains committed to shooting on celluloid for as long as he possibly can. And

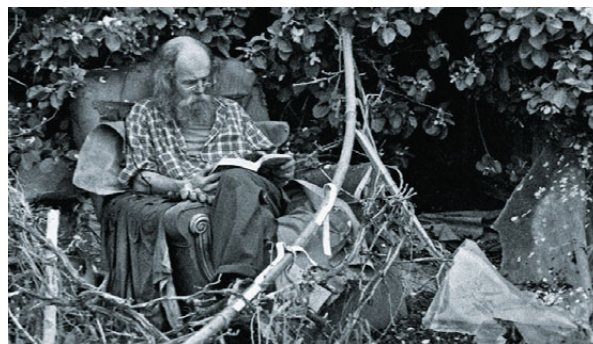
this despite the unfortunate series of setbacks that have held up his debut feature’s 35mm blow-up for more than half a year: a lab closure, a temporarily lost negative, another lab’s relocation etc. Likening the drama to witchcraft, Rivers is exceptionally good-natured about the whole saga, recognising the irony between having to premiere the film digitally and his interest in ruins, detritus and eschatological scenarios that double as loving odes to a dying medium.

Two Years at Sea harbours enough mystery and ambiguity to invite multiple readings, though it nevertheless joins what Rivers calls his “post-apocalyptic-last-man-type films” – ones that exist in the future even though they look like they’re from an ashen, distant past. These films stem from “a slightly bleak worldview”, he acknowledges. “The films are hopeful in a way – there’s joy in them – but there’s also an underlying unease about the present. It’s certainly not all roses, the world we live in, and it worries me. How does one survive in a world that’s been depleted? We’ve taken for granted so many of our luxuries. What happens when you take those away?”

Filmmakers like Lav Diaz and Béla Tarr have recently grappled with similar issues specific to their own circumstances and experience – evidence, perhaps, of a global gloom. And yet *Two Years at Sea* is in many ways the opposite of Tarr’s devastating swansong *The Turin Horse*, offering birdsong instead of howling winds, independence instead of entrapment, and wafting nostalgic melancholia (or is it a *Walden*-esque happiness and plenitude?) instead of Nietzschean despair. “My films are propositions,” Rivers concludes. “I never want to be dogmatic. I hope the film is a way of exciting the imagination of the viewer to alternate possibilities.”

■ *‘Two Years at Sea’ is released on 4 May, and is reviewed on page 81. ‘Slow Action’ is showing at the Hepworth, Wakefield until 10 June*

MAN FOR ALL SEASONS
‘Two Years at Sea’ depicts a life that’s solitary but rich in its texture and its connection with nature



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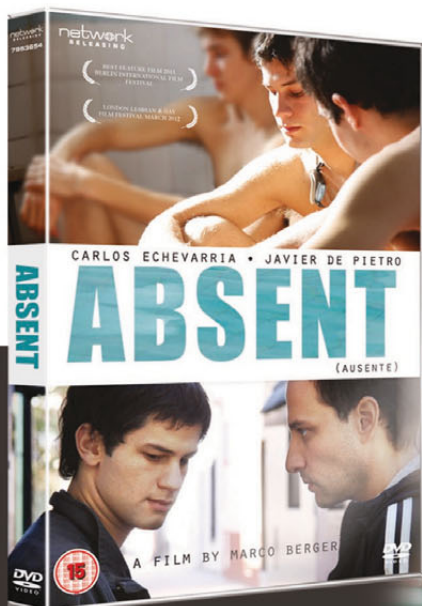
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CHANGE OF PACE
Mumblecore alumna Greta Gerwig, opposite, plays idealistic student Violet in 'Damsels in Distress'; the first film since 1998 from director Whit Stillman, left

Fans of Whit Stillman have had a long wait for another taste of his acerbic dialogue and wry social portraiture.

Nick Pinkerton talks to him about 'Damsels in Distress'

WHIT AND WHIMSY

The walls of the conference room in New York City's Chippendale-topped Sony Tower where I watched the latest and presumably final edit of Whit Stillman's fourth film *Damsels in Distress* were dominated by two massive, gilt-framed reproductions of 19th-century painter James Tissot's canvases (*Hush!* and *Too Early*). The press liaison informed me that they'd been commissioned back in 1993, when they dressed the walls of the ballroom of the Beaufort family's Fifth Avenue mansion in *The Age of Innocence*.

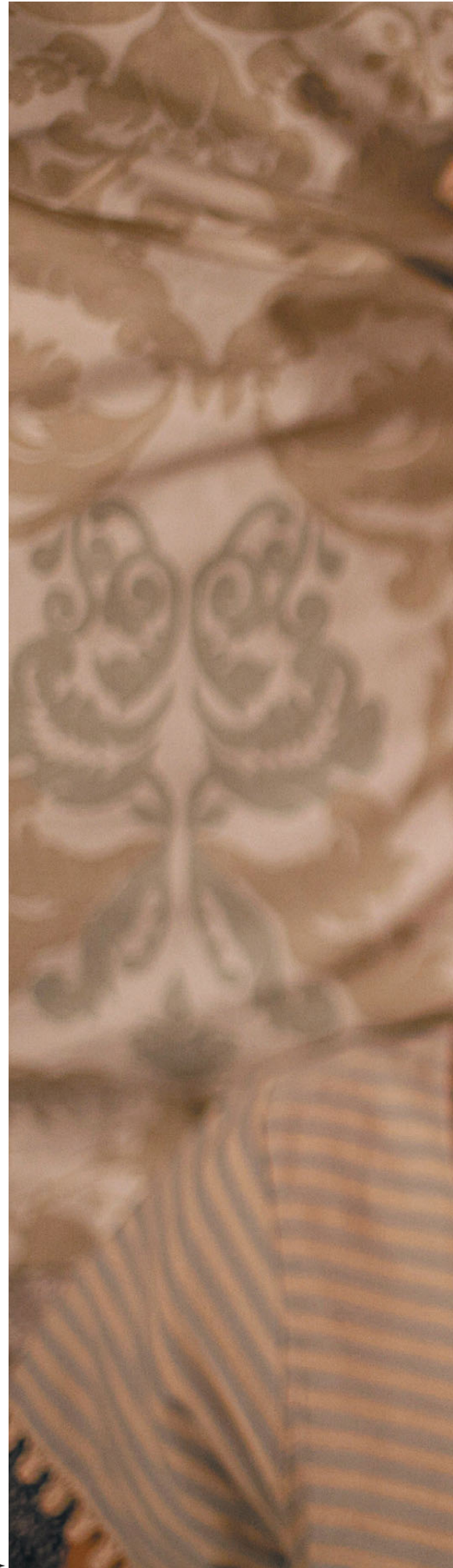
This is oddly appropriate, for Martin Scorsese's great adaptation of Edith Wharton's novel, though set in the 1870s, deals with the same Eastern US elite as writer-director Stillman's films, beginning with 1990's *Metropolitan*. (And Scorsese was certainly aware of Stillman's film while preparing *The Age of Innocence*, for he cast *Metropolitan*'s female lead, Carolyn Farina, in a small speaking role.)

Metropolitan was a product of the same late-80s/early-90s over-the-barricades moment for American independent filmmaking that established such names as Spike Lee, Hal Hartley, Steven Soderbergh and Jim Jarmusch. Released when Stillman was 38 years old and exhibiting a long-gestated, wholly developed, totally one-off

sensibility, *Metropolitan* was followed at regular intervals by *Barcelona* (1994) and *The Last Days of Disco* (1998). The trilogy established Stillman as a maker of benign and bittersweet social satires featuring fluent, affluent, somewhat young-fogeyish characters exchanging tart, aphoristic dialogue – most deftly handled by actor Chris Eigeman, who in all three films played a variation on the same amoral moralist.

The unique vantage of these works was informed by Stillman's personal history: the son of a Democratic politician from the upstate New York branch of an old-moneyed family, separated from the fortune after his father's remarriage, Stillman had converted from campus *sans culotte* to a champion of the retrograde debutante scene (*Metropolitan*), later becoming a Yankee businessman in virulently anti-NATO Spain in the early 1980s (*Barcelona*) and a straight, WASP habitué of the pansexual, multiracial, bacchic dancefloors of Studio 54 (*The Last Days of Disco*).

Less directly autobiographical in its subject matter, *Damsels in Distress* takes place on the campus of Seven Oaks University, a fictional amalgam of elite North-eastern establishments represented on screen by Snug Harbor, a collection of Greek Revival buildings on the north shore of Staten Island, originally built to house retired sailors. The university is, we're informed, "the last





Whit Stillman Damsels in Distress



ENTANGLEMENTS
Violet (Greta Gerwig, top) is drawn to Charlie (Adam Brody, middle), while her friend Lily (Analeigh Tipton, above right) practises Cathar love with grad student Xavier (Hugo Becker)

of the Select Seven to go co-ed”; facing the slovenly “atmosphere of male barbarism” embodied by its fraternities, the ladies must stick together. On New Student Orientation day, sloe-eyed, lithe-torsoed incoming student Lily (Analeigh Tipton, a ranking contestant on *America’s Next Top Model*) is recruited by a self-assured clique of young women: Rose (Megalyne Echikunwoke), a corseted moralist who castigates the others in a rather suspicious London accent; bright-eyed Heather (Carrie MacLemore), who happily chirps that she has “no very strong principles”; and Violet Wister (Greta Gerwig), who passes as their leader because she talks the most, in that quizzical, musing Stillman style that’s so long been absent from our screens.

I first spoke to Whit Stillman in the summer of 2009, shortly after he’d returned to New York City from years spent mostly abroad (nine in Paris, two in Madrid) – a period studded with the announcement of ‘departure’ projects that never seemed to materialise: an adaptation of Christopher Buckley’s satirical novel *Little Green Men*; something set during the Chinese cultural revolution; a film fusing together two unfinished Jane Austen novels; and – above all else – *Dancing Mood*, set in Kingston during the early 1960s, inspired by Stillman’s love of the period’s ska and rocksteady music. When we talked, he’d just been having a frustrating time in London “trying to do the Jamaican film with a very good producer”. As he explained, “Over there, essentially, they have three buyers for their projects – seven individuals make all the decisions, which is not really a good situation. We struck out with those three buyers.”

Back then, Stillman was jocular, if clearly a little frustrated with just how much time had slipped away. “If you can’t spur demand, at least you can increase scarcity,” he joked, mentioning in passing a “dark-horse candidate” currently underway – which turned out to be *Damsels in Distress*. The film was finally shot last year, and unveiled in September at the Venice and Toronto film festivals.

In March this year, Stillman and I planned to meet on a Saturday evening in Manhattan – until we realised the date we’d chosen coincided with a carnival orgy that, in New York at least, outdoes the worst of Seven Oaks’ frat bashes: St Patrick’s Day. (“Omigosh, you’re right! That’s terrifying,” read Stillman’s email – “omigosh” being about his strongest epithet.) I spoke to the director via Skype instead, when he was still flush from the previous evening’s well-received Los Angeles screening of *Damsels*, whose particular role in his filmography he was immediately eager to clarify:

“I do think the first three films are kind of a triptych – are similar in their narrative approach – and I see this as something else, either a heightened or lowered reality, with a certain stylisation that wasn’t in the other films. I was encouraged to leave the real world in the last sequence of *Disco* – in which New Yorkers of all walks are seen from a passing subway train spontaneously grooving to The O’Jays’ ‘Love Train’ on underground platforms – “where I could see how breaking the boundaries of reality worked...It’s one of the things that I think stymied me in my Jamaican script, because that also had

gotten into unreal elements: the Jamaican script has angels and demons in it – they’re comic angels and demons – and I think that caused me a lot of problems in London among those film buyers who tend to be increasingly in the bleak realism prison.”

“*Damsels*, I would say, comes more from within than without,” he continues. “It’s true that each of the other films I see as a Utopian vision: *Metropolitan* is sort of the bookish, Utopian version of debutante parties; *Barcelona* is the Utopian version of Americans falling in love abroad; and *Disco* is the Utopian version of the nightclub experience. And this is even more clearly Violet Wister’s Utopian version of college life. It’s these girls trying to create an environment they will be comfortable in.”

“We’d like to help you,” is Violet’s pick-up line to Lily, striking the same charitable – and often obviously condescending – tone that she sounds through the film’s opening chapters. The girls are evangelists, missionaries out to cleanse the male student bodies of Seven Oaks; when not exercising their civilising and sanitising influence at beer busts, they volunteer at the campus Suicide Prevention Center, which offers coffee, doughnuts and tap-dance therapy to unhappy undergraduates. Violet particularly believes in the restorative powers of soft-shoe tap: “I’d like to do something especially significant in my lifetime,” she says, “Such as starting a new dance craze.”

But the girls’ programme of refinement is interrupted by the complications of love. By dating frat lunkhead Frank (Ryan Metcalf), Violet practises charity even in her personal life, extolling the virtues of hopeless dullards. “Do you know what’s the major problem in contemporary social life?” she asks Lily. “The tendency, very widespread, to always seek someone ‘cooler’ than yourself. Why not instead find someone who’s frankly inferior?” There’s an echo here of Taylor Nichols’s Ted in *Barcelona*, resolving “to go out only with plain or even rather homely girls” – although the rule in Stillman’s comedies is that, after the romantic confusion settles down, like finally comes to rest alongside like. (As Stillman points out: “I’m not a big believer in opposites *staying* attracted.”)

While an ambiguous character named Charlie (Adam Brody of *The O.C.*, taking to Stillman’s dialogue like a duck to water) hangs between Violet and Lily, Lily takes up with sophisticated French grad student Xavier (*Gossip Girl*’s Hugo Becker), who introduces her to the peculiar, non-reproductive lovemaking practices of the Cathars, an obscure medieval gnostic Christian sect. For Stillman, Xavier’s sexual shot-calling “stands in for anything where the cooler or more advanced person is trying to talk the more naive person into something they don’t necessarily want to do”. (And one of the movie’s biggest laughs comes from Heather’s conspicuous silence during the others’ horrified discussion of Cathar love.)

In comparison, say, to *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, the 2004 novel by Tom Wolfe (who once championed the very young Stillman to *Harper’s* magazine) with its preoccupation with ‘hook-up’ culture at the turn of the 21st century, *Damsels*’ version of the contemporary campus seems fairly

‘When I went to college it was far more radical and extreme than it is now. It was really pretty terrifying’

benign. But as Stillman, himself a 1973 graduate of Harvard, insists: “When I went to college it was far more scary and radical and extreme than it is now. I have two daughters, one currently in university and one just got out of university, and their experience was much closer to this film than it would’ve been to my experience. When I went it was really pretty terrifying how radical and extreme things got, where our environment was being torn up constantly – every month there would be conflagrations in Harvard Square. In *The Crimson* [the Harvard newspaper], where I was, you felt like it was something out of Robespierre.

“What is the reality of a period?” he continues. “People experience it in different ways. And the fiction of period is that everyone, like lemmings, jumps off the cliff at the same time, when in fact people have very important experiences *not* jumping off the cliff with the other lemmings. And so a lot of my friends and I were formed in reaction to what was going on in university for most people in our time.”

I’m sure Stillman would concur with the French poet Charles Péguy’s maxim: “It will never be known what acts of cowardice have been committed for fear of not looking sufficiently progressive.” He would almost certainly agree, also, with Eric Rohmer’s statement: “My characters’ discourse is not necessarily my film’s discourse.” Which is what makes Stillman an artist and entertainer, rather than a polemicist. He writes his films as see-saws of dicta and contradicta – a perfect example of which appears in *Barcelona*, when innocents-abroad cousins Ted and Fred, played by Stillman mainstays Nichols and Eigeman, discuss the effects of the late-arriving sexual revolution on Spain after Franco:

“Here in Barcelona, everything was swept aside. The world was turned upside down and stayed there.”

“Has it ever occurred to you that maybe the world was upside down before, and now it’s right side up?”

The back-and-forth in *Damsels* is between Judeo-Christian restraint and pagan debauch, prideful charity and true humility, and – most importantly – cynicism and kindness:

“You think I’m gonna kill myself and make you look bad?”

“I’m worried that you’ll kill yourself and make *yourself* look bad.”

Of the particularly irreverent attitude that *Damsels* takes towards the solemn subject of suicide, Stillman says: “On the territory of over-dramatisation, you will never win the argument against the drastic and self-destructive. You have to entirely change the perspective. By not taking something seriously – by de-dramatising the debate, by taking that out – that’s the only way of really replying. You cannot win the argument on the hyper-dramatic ground, you have to completely change the field of consideration.”

Irreverence, then, becomes a bulwark against despair. Stillman speaks with compassion and evident emotion of the 2010 suicide of Tyler Clementi, an 18-year-old freshman at New Jersey’s Rutgers University who jumped from a bridge after his dorm-mate surreptitiously used a webcam to expose him in a same-sex encounter.



ON A MISSION

Left to right: Heather (Carrie MacLemore), Lily (Analeigh Tipton), Rose (Megalyn Echikunwoke) and Violet (Greta Gerwig) resolve to clean up the campus

We also discuss the rash of student suicides in 2002-03 at New York University’s Bobst Library, whose suspended crosswalks provided perfect diving boards for the hopeless.

“I’ve found that there are a lot of people with this phobia of atriums,” Stillman comments. “The atrium temptation – the edge-of-something temptation – I have it a bit myself. I just cannot understand why contemporary architects have to do this in every structure – it really drives me nuts. More and more I love classical and traditional vernacular architecture, and one of the great things about it is a lot of these things are entirely avoided in architectural tradition. All these [old] buildings I’m completely comfortable in, and then I get in all these crazy airports and atria and shopping malls and hotels with all these jumping points, and I find it unnerving. Apparently there’s some sort of psychological draw of these open spaces, and even people who are not particularly suicidal are kind of whimsically, crazily drawn to flight.”

This is such a classic Stillman run, one wishes it had made it into the movie – though it does in a fashion, with a gag involving students throwing themselves unsuccessfully over the first-storey balustrade of the Education School, thus illustrating Stillman’s theory of the inconvenience of properly performing self-slaughter in a neoclassical structure.

Point of departure

Writing about Stillman back in 2009, I concluded: “There’ll be nothing even like Stillman’s three films until he makes another.” This has not exactly proved true, for *Damsels*, despite its thematic similarities, is not entirely of a piece with what came before. I’ve seen two edits of *Damsels* now, the second trimmed for a PG-13. (And who but Stillman, who has confessed an affection for Golden Age Hollywood’s official censor Joseph I. Breen, would say something like: “I think the MPAA helped us out...”?)

Though the second cut does have more bounce and a somewhat lighter touch, I still don’t know quite how to make head or tail of the movie, which is transitional in a way that’s both restorative and awkward. The dialogue is often as sharp as ever (with the exception of some notable dead-air moments), but the tertiary characters

are less fully realised than before; Megalyn Echikunwoke’s Rose in particular suffers from her curious, intractable, incantation-like repetition of certain suspicious phrases (“a playboy, or operator move”, “confidence tricksters”). And though Stillman has gone far in cleansing mumblecore alumna Greta Gerwig’s performance of the over-thought naturalistic mannerisms that usually goo up her line readings, her charm is evasive; she’s the first Stillman protagonist who fails to make striving for good really appealing.

In contrast with the warm, low-budget elegance achieved in the first three features, *Damsels’* visuals, shot on a RED camera by DP Doug Emmett, often come dangerously near the palette of a Mentos commercial. A concluding musical number, meant as affirmation, instead falls in an uncomfortable crevasse between home-made charm and plain sloppiness. (When Violet and Charlie plashingly dance as though floating on the water of a Neptune fountain, the platform they’re dancing on is clearly visible.)

And yet there’s something invigorating in the wilful strangeness of *Damsels*. Stillman admits that Violet, whose passion for orthodoxy ironically delivers her to a kind of radical individualism, is the character he feels closest to. (Stillman’s oddball-conventionalist convictions might best be pinned as ‘Tory anarchism’, more indebted to Max Beerbohm than Orwell.) When Violet expresses a love of “clichés and hackneyed expressions of any kind” as repositories of wisdom, Stillman says she’s actually “being original and eccentric. The absolute clichéd mode for a sophomore would be to rail against clichés and hackneyed expressions.”

Violet finally does attempt to launch her dance craze, the “Sambola”, on an ill-attended night at an off-campus honky-tonk. The dance is really Stillman’s invention, and the Sambola is danced over the closing credits, inviting the world to join in. In this pre-release moment of nervous anticipation, it’s a possibility that *Damsels* and the Sambola may never find their audience, leaving Stillman and Violet cha-cha-ing alone to their own beat. Lily, for one, finally officially breaks rhythm with Violet, associating her would-be mentor with the “uniqueness, eccentricity, independence” that she’s hoping to outgrow.

“Does the world really want or need more of such traits?” she asks. Lord knows, our movies do.

■ *‘Damsels in Distress’* is released on 27 April, and is reviewed on page 60

From Futurism to Dogme, filmmakers have regularly thrown down the gauntlet with new sets of laws for their art. **Nick James** charts a brief history of the manifesto

REVOLT INTO STYLE



STATEMENT OF INTENT
A young director's egalitarian principles lead to ructions with the crew in Edgar Reitz's 'Heimat 2'

Towards the end of Edgar Reitz's magnificent television series *Heimat 2: Chronicle of a Generation*, which follows the shifting fates of musicians, artists and filmmakers coming of age in Munich during the 1960s, smooth film director Stefan Aufhauser (Frank Röth) arrives at a villa in Berlin, the set of his new film *Die Deutsche Angst*, with his fragile lead actress Olga Mueller (Lena Lessing). The year is 1968, and the first thing he does is gather the crew together for an announcement.

"There are one or two things I want to put on record," Stefan says. "What makes a film is what you don't see. I want us all to be one big happy family. Equal responsibility for all." Within 24 hours he's made to regret these words as the cast, crew, extras and politicised friends all insist on reading the script and critiquing it. Suddenly he finds he needs the electrician's approval before he can start filming.

"I understand you want a say in the story," Stefan tells them. "Nobody likes just taking orders, but I don't mean it like this. There can only be one director." Alas he's too late. The genie is out of the bottle. He realises he must collaborate more than he intended. Olga is very upset by the delay. Stefan tries to comfort her. "Think of the critics," he says, "all lefties to a man." But she's inconsolable. When one of the crew tells her, "We're living in revolutionary times," she slaps him, hard.

Days later, Rob Stuermer (Peter Weiss), the film's idealistic cameraman, professes the new faith in a manifesto delivered to his camera: "Today making a film means taking responsibility – responsibility for political awareness. A feature film is just a dead record of a lot of pre-rehearsed scenes. Vision is only truth when we feel what we see... The camera has no feelings, so it is absurd just aiming it at things as they do on TV. To approach the truth, the cameraman must get his feelings into the picture." Tragic irony arrives while he is saying this: Stefan – who's done a secret deal with American financiers – marches into the villa with a posse of removal men and shuts the picture down.

With its vivid contrasting of cynicism with idealism and the kind of playful counter-exploitation peculiar to left-wing politics of the 1960s and 70s, part 12 of *Heimat 2* is a sharp portrayal of the procrastinations of revolutionary

debate and the dynamics of setting self-limitations on art. Few knew the complexities of such things better than Edgar Reitz. He was one of the 26 original signatories of the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto (the 50th anniversary of which is celebrated this year).

By the early 1960s, the writing of manifestos was a well-established modernist tradition, the hip way to attack any entrenched status quo. As Alex Danchev's recent collection *100 Artists' Manifestos*, (published in the Penguin Modern Classics series) attests, the manifesto attended most of the crucial stages in the evolution of modernism in all artforms throughout the 20th century, not least the cinema. They've been a necessary activity in the art world ever since Marinetti's 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism' was splashed across the front page of *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909.

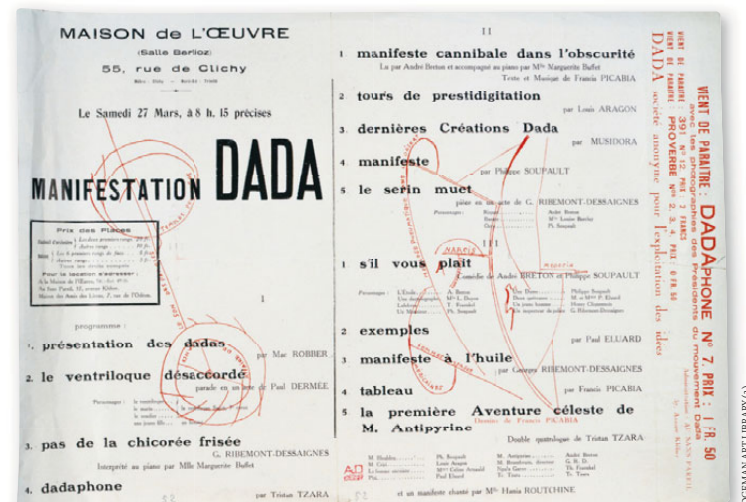
Recourse to polemical statements of intent is said to be a reaction to our experience of modernity. According to Marshall Berman's seminal book *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, "To be modern... is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and hold onto something real even as everything melts." Modernity, he adds, "nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own."

As we shall see, the manifestos of artists or filmmakers are usually full of such zealous, hopeful and enthusiastic language, but the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto was not like that. Compared to the demands of the Futurists or Dziga Vertov's 'WE' (1922), its stipulations seem quite modest, almost polite. After all, its authors were at that time young makers of short films, not yet schooled in hard politics. And – somewhat typically for manifestos – its demands are spirited but vague. Here are its climactic points:

"Film needs to be more independent, free from all the usual industry conventions, free from the control of commercial partners, free from the dictation of stakeholders. We have detailed spiritual, structural and economic ideas about the production of new German cinema. Together



ANGRY YOUNG MEN
Alexander Kluge, above
standing, and members
of the Oberhausen Group
in 1962



Filmmakers' manifestos



BY STILL: POSTERS AND DESIGNS (OXFORD COLLECTION) (1)

we're willing to take any risk. Conventional film is dead. We believe in the new film."

It sounds, from today's perspective, like an extract from a board meeting, but what's most heartening about Oberhausen is the knowledge that eventually the filmmakers got much of what they wanted. There was an undercurrent of dissent among German youth at the time; the Schwabinger riots, which erupted that same year in Munich, would come to be seen as a precursor of the worldwide protests of 1968. In film circles, the German echo of the *nouvelle vague*'s complaint against the *cinéma de papa* was the more direct catchphrase: "Papás Kino ist tod."

Rob Stuermer's speech in the scene from *Heimat 2* describes the position of many of the Oberhausen Group. But the Oberhausen signatory who was most effective in bringing about change was not Reitz but Alexander Kluge, a former lawyer whose success as a writer and filmmaker brought the attention and opportunity the movement needed. According to the German critic Olaf Möller, Kluge was an adept tactician with a "great enthusiasm for open systems", whereas Reitz "spoke the word 'I' so compellingly that everyone was able to hear it as 'we'".

The title of Kluge's first feature *Abschied von gestern* (literally 'parting from yesterday') summed up the Oberhausen mood, and the film's success in winning the Silver Lion in Venice in 1966 was pivotal. Pressure from the group brought about changes in film funding from the TV sector that eventually allowed the flowering of New German Cinema of the 1970s, seen in the burgeoning careers of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff, Margarethe von Trotta, Jean-Marie Straub, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Wim Wenders, most of whom allied themselves to the Oberhausen Group.

But the New German Cinema story of structural changes in funding arising out of a decade's worth of debate and lobbying is hardly the kind of thing dreamed of by those who draw up manifestos. Manifesto-making, as it was conceived at the beginning of the 20th century, was an incendiary business of instant creation out of destruction. The six Italian authors of 'The Futurist Cinema' (1916) boast of "a joyful deformation of the universe, an alogical, fleeting synthesis of life in the world, [that] will become... a school of joy, of speed, of force, of courage and heroism... The cinema... must above all... detach itself from reality,

from photography, from the graceful and solemn, it must become anti-graceful, deforming, impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic, free-wording."

You can feel in this language the love of speed and instantaneity that so marked the Futurists' vision for art. However, all this positivity only comes after 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism' has exhorted people to "grab your picks and your axes and your hammers and then demolish, pitilessly demolish, all venerated cities." The book in particular was seen as an enemy of the Futurists. "The book has for a long time been fated to disappear," states 'The Futurist Cinema', "static companion of the sedentary, the nostalgic, the neutralist, [it] cannot entertain or exalt the New Futurist generations." The war that the Futurists so craved as cleansing came in 1914 and killed a good many of them. The survivors mostly took up with Mussolini's Fascists, which makes their rage against the book all the more chilling when seen in the light of the book-burning to come.

In the meantime, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia utterly transformed the dynamic of international culture as well as politics; for a time short of filmstock to shoot with, the new Soviet filmmakers had the time to theorise cinema as never before. Berman's book makes a solid case for seeing all the early manifesto-makers as the children of Marx and Nietzsche in terms of their exhortatory language, and in that sense Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's 'WE: Variant of a Manifesto', produced during the Soviet Union's pro-modernist phase, certainly takes no prisoners:

"WE proclaim the old films, based on the romance, theatrical films and the like, to be leprous... 'Cinematography' must die so that the art of the cinema may live... WE are cleansing the *kinochestvo* [cinema eye] of foreign matter – of music, literature, and theatre; we seek our own rhythm, one lifted from nowhere else, and we find it in the movement of things... The 'psychological' prevents man from being as precise as a stopwatch; it interferes with his desire for kinship with the machine... we therefore take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space."

The totalitarian flavour of Dziga Vertov's rhetoric is, to me, every bit as chilling as that of the Futurists. You feel that by "kinship with the

machine" he doesn't mean a boy and his bicycle, more a driver and his tank. But the era of great statements did have its positive effects. What these early film manifestos point towards, at least in terms of crystallised results, are the avant-garde cinema that flourished from the 1920s onwards, and the later *cinéma vérité* tradition.

The chain of manifestos that followed thereafter (most of which appear in Danchev's book) repeat many of the original's tropes ("purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual', professional & commercialised culture," raged Fluxus in 1963), but can equally well subvert themselves (the Dadaists took to manifestos wholesale, if only in order to mock them: "DADA MEANS NOTHING," insisted Tristan Tzara). Surrealism's huge influence on cinema is too great to be gauged merely from André Breton's several manifestos, but despite the Surrealists' success in bridging the gap between the avant garde and the popular, the intimacy between art practice and filmmaking that existed in the 1920s began to wane after the coming of sound. The Great Depression and the subsequent conflagration of World War II only widened this divide.

Style and attitude

Perhaps war-weariness explains the politeness noticeable in the Oberhausen document. Gradualist requests seem to have been endemic to the post-war period. The French Groupe des Trente (whose work forms part of the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival's 50th-anniversary celebrations this month) came together in 1953 to protest against the removal of a wartime law demanding that a short be shown before every feature in French cinemas. Their number included Alexandre Astruc, Jacques Demy, Georges Franju, Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, and they did sterling work promoting the short film as an artform (though the law was not renewed). The British documentary group Free Cinema, formed by Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson and Lorenza Mazzetti in 1956, stuck to epigrammatic statements of belief: "No film can be too personal. The image speaks. Sound amplifies and comments. Size is irrelevant. Perfection is not an aim. An attitude means a style. A style means an attitude."

By contrast 'The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group', a lengthy document issued by 20 avant-garde directors in 1961, has

PROVOCATEURS

From far left: Werner Herzog, Dziga Vertov and Lars von Trier each drew a line in the sand with pronouncements on the rules of cinema

a pragmatic, world-weary tone of its own: "The official cinema all over the world is running out of breath. It is morally corrupt, esthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring."

Britain's great fiction co-directors Powell and Pressburger were more blunt in their 1942 manifesto letter to Deborah Kerr, designed to persuade her to take part in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. "We owe allegiance to nobody except the financial interests which provide our money; and, to them, the sole responsibility of ensuring them a profit, not a loss." Their acknowledgement of money's necessity is, in the context of manifestos, quite refreshing.

In complete contrast, Stan Brakhage's 1963 'Metaphors of Vision' returned to the single eye, but emphasised the poetic: "I suggest that there is a pursuit of knowledge foreign to language and founded upon visual communication, demanding a development of the optical mind, and dependent on perception in the original and deepest sense of the word." Part of me thinks Brakhage has here unwittingly written a mission statement for those who would do without literature, but the other part of me would regard his words as the perfect end of any discussion about film manifestos.

The spirit lives on

If, as I believe, our own times amount to a kind of super-refinement, distillation or compound of the modernist experience, then tracing the evolution and survival of the film manifesto beyond the modernist era is essential. But before I consider more recent diktats such as Dogme 95's 'Vow of Chastity' and Werner Herzog's 1999 'Minnesota Declaration', I must acknowledge two obvious deficiencies in this article: 1) the generalisation and stomping over history in which any article-length look at manifestos must indulge; and 2) my exclusion of the one strand of manifesto-making that's too complex and delicate to be touched on here: I mean the vital discussions around Latin American cinema that retain traces of the revolutionary fervour and violence of the early European manifestos, including Glauber Rocha's 'Aesthetic of Hunger' (1965), Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's 'Towards a Third Cinema' (1969) and Rogério Sganzerla's 'The Aesthetic of Garbage' (1968).

All manifestos tend to begin with a status quo to be got rid of, and usually more of their content



'Discipline is the answer. We must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition.' Lars von Trier

is devoted to what must be removed than to what will replace it. The 'Dogme 95' document drawn up by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in 1995 harks back to the time of the *nouvelle vague* and Oberhausen. "In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck... The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was [sic] the bourgeois perception of art."

This goes to the crux of what the film manifesto may lead to. The goal should never be the promotion of successful auteur careers, even if that's how things eventually pan out. Film manifestos in particular – as the scene I opened with illustrates – are often concerned with the dichotomy of a collective art put at the disposal of an auteur, and as such are prone to analogies with totalitarian models of dictatorship in a communal context. The postmodern manifesto, of which 'Dogme 95' is a great example, cannot avoid the ironies of its declarations. "For the first time, anyone can make movies," note von Trier and Vinterberg. "But the more accessible the medium becomes, the more important the avant garde. It is no accident that the phrase 'avant garde' has military connotations. Discipline is the answer... we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition."

I find it hard to see von Trier as either a truly avant-garde filmmaker or a great self-abnegating collaborator, but unlike most manifestos, 'Dogme 95' did boil down to a very practical set of self-

imposed restrictions aimed at countering "the deadly embrace of sensation... the film of illusion". It's a matter of debate whether it amounted to more than a briefly flowering aesthetic born of cheap technology that allowed the camera certain new freedoms of movement and access. But one thing manifestos do teach us is that the real avant garde seems to need its broadsides and statements of focus simply in order to keep its practice in the public eye. In that sense, rather than believing what's written, it's better to view manifestos as bulletins from the collective unconscious, symptoms of the general sickness or health of film culture.

One member of the Oberhausen generation who will recall as well as Reitz the ferment of the 1960s is Werner Herzog. In his 1999 'Minnesota Declaration' he takes the opposite view to 'Dogme 95'. "There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth," he claims. "It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylisation."

As if to prove the point, he adds these cautionary words for manifesto readers: "The moon is dull. Mother Nature doesn't call, doesn't speak to you, although a glacier eventually farts. And don't you listen to the Song of Life."

■ A special programme celebrating the Oberhausen Manifesto will be showing at the 58th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen from 26 April to 1 May. More information is available at www.oberhausener-manifest.com. Edgar Reitz's 'Lust for Love' and 'The Tailor from Ulm' are out on DVD this month



In the first of two pieces making the case for contenders in S&S's poll to find the Greatest Film of All Time, **Hannah McGill** revisits 'Beau Travail', Claire Denis's rapturous 1998 exploration of male identity in crisis

BLOOD AND SAND

POLL COUNTDOWN

No. 4

Directed by Claire Denis, and scripted by Denis and her regular writing partner Jean-Pol Fargeau around a loose riff on Herman Melville's novella *Billy Budd*, *Beau Travail* (1998) is set in a remote coastal outpost in the former French colony of Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa. Here a battalion of Foreign Legionnaires spend their days enacting gruelling training regimes on desert terrain, and their evenings circling girls at the local nightclub. Commander Bruno Forestier (Michel Subor) is admired by his men; less so is his prickly, solitary second-in-command Sergeant Galoup (Denis Lavant). Galoup is more interested in being "the perfect legionnaire" than in being popular – at least until the arrival of sweet-natured new recruit Gilles Sentain (Grégoire Colin).

Quite what winds Galoup up so much about Sentain isn't clear, but it seems to be the latter's apparent contentment and ease in living. These are, implicitly, untoward character traits in a legionnaire, who ought to have been driven into exile by some stigma, trauma or misdeed. "He had no reason to be with us in the Legion," Galoup notes in the account that we see him penning after the events, heard as voiceover. By joining the Legion, Galoup deliberately isolated himself in a context where dysfunctionality is the norm – where he would meet no resistance to his theory that "we all have a trashcan deep within." The arrival of a loveable kid capable of using conventional social graces poses a threat to Galoup's alternative social structure. Into

this kingdom of the blind has walked a paragon possessed of perfect vision, and Galoup is none too keen on the prospect of being seen.

In which case we can't help but note that he is very much in the wrong film. Movement, gesture and glance tend to reveal at least as much as dialogue in the films of Claire Denis. Nowhere else in her work does she push this visual language as far as in *Beau Travail*, a near-ballet of a film that's at least as much a work of choreography as of verbal storytelling. But if Galoup's scribbled notes are clearly his subjective account, it's not clear whether his memory is our only guide. It's tempting to assume that the film's most abstract and movement-driven sequences represent material that Galoup has retrodden so many times in memory that it's fragmented and become surreal: a fight with Sentain transfigured into something akin to a tango; combat training moving into what amounts to a mass bout of ritualised hugging.

By provoking Sentain to intervene in the mistreatment of another soldier, Galoup turns Sentain's own good nature against him, in order to be justified in disciplining him. We gather that the punishment visited on Sentain – a lone trek into the desert with a sabotaged compass – is intended to kill him. But other elements of the story hinge on events to which Galoup cannot have borne witness. Does he know, or merely guess, which soldier betrays him to Sentain with the words, "He doesn't like you. Beware"? Do we see Sentain survive his final ordeal because Galoup did – or because some self-justifying part of Galoup wants to believe that he did, as evinced by the coyly self-justifying aside, "He could easily have crossed the mountains into Ethiopia"?

Throughout her body of work, Denis has toyed with subjective and objective realities – with whether her characters are living through externally manifested events, self-protective imaginings or symbol-heavy dreams. Like the legionnaire whose original identity is masked behind a false name, *Beau Travail* is cagey about the point of view it occupies. Recourse to *Billy Budd* offers some illumination, but Melville's text – a brief work from the unproductive late period of his career, left incomplete at the time of his death in 1891 – has plentiful ambiguities of its own, compounded by posthumous publication and multiple revisions.

Set aboard a late-18th century British man-of-war, *Billy Budd* tells of a sailor whose beauty and popularity stir fascination in all who meet him, and destructive envy in the master-at-arms Claggart, who frames him for fomenting mutiny and ultimately ensures his execution. The prelapsarian innocence so fetishised in Billy (who "in the nude might have posed for a statue of a young Adam before the Fall") represents a beautiful but weak position, one powerless against the machinations of the already fallen. Billy finally incriminates himself because he lacks the sophistication to defend himself: at the crucial moment a debilitating stutter prevents him from forming words.

Modern interpretation of *Billy Budd* has tended to focus on its homosexual undercurrents. These are indeed hard to avoid, even with consideration of altered mores and shifted terminology: young Billy's physical beauty preoccupies Melville's text to an almost comic extent, while his detractor



DUEL IN THE SUN

In 'Beau Travail', Sergeant Galoup (Denis Lavant, top) sets out to destroy Sentain (Grégoire Colin, opposite), a new recruit to the French Foreign Legion

is clearly motivated in part by frustrated desire. Our narrator (a bystander rather than one of the antagonists, as in *Beau Travail*) invents for Billy the quasi-iconic designation "The Handsome Sailor": one bound by his "natural regality" to secure and accept "the spontaneous homage of his shipmates". As readers, we can't escape Billy's girlishly smooth face, his golden locks or the sweetness of nature that draws men to him as "hornets to treacle". Billy's destroyer, Claggart, regards all this bounty with "a touch of soft yearning, as if [he] could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban".

Whether or not Melville's main impetus was the expression of thwarted gay passion, *Beau Travail* – emerging as it did at a time of assertive queer cinema and queer reading of apparently straight texts – inherited the interpretation, and indeed arguably compounded it through its knowing deployment of queer-identified imagery. Certainly the intensity of Galoup's obsession with Sentain mimics the symptoms of love, particularly love as it tends to be experienced by those *film noir* protagonists who identify it as an emotion not dissimilar to murderous rage.

"Something vague and menacing" takes hold of Galoup, according to his voiceover; "a sort of rancour, a rage brimming"; "something overpowering". He also jealously identifies Sentain as a potential new favourite of his

beloved Forestier: "keep Sentain away from Forestier," runs one of his neurotic inner notes, as he predicts – somehow, through all of this – "the end, the end of me, the end of Forestier". Is this 'end', in his estimation, the disgrace of a gay affair – Forestier's with Sentain? Does Galoup intervene not out of his own love for either man, but to prevent Forestier from slipping – from abandoning the self-denial that holds their way of life together? Sentain, unlike Billy Budd, isn't markedly objectified by his superiors; desiring looks here pass from the camera to the performers, not between the characters themselves. If there's an intense love in this story, it's Galoup's for Forestier, but the tenor of that connection seems more familial than sexual. Galoup responds to Sentain not like a jealous lover, but like an older sibling displaced by a new baby.

Beau Travail does frankly foreground male beauty, thereby highlighting the tension at the heart of a military society in which sentimental notions of comradeship, solidarity and love among men must strive to separate themselves from the taboo of homosexuality. The French Foreign Legion, set up post-French Revolution to allow the state to circumvent its own laws barring foreigners from military service, quickly developed a reputation as a refuge or site of self-imposed punishment for men with troubled pasts; that implied criminality, but also sexual misdeeds of one stripe or another.

A certain camp romanticism attaches itself to the Legion's reputation, and so does specific gay mythology. Jean Genet joined at 18 (and

BEU STILL, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

was subsequently ejected for a homosexual act); Cole Porter claimed to have done a stint too; the popularity of Edith Piaf's 'Non, je ne regrette rien' as a Legion theme song creates a delicious rapport between the personas of the tear-stained stage diva and the stoic, careworn legionnaire.

If camp as identified by Susan Sontag constitutes "the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve" all seen through "the sensibility of failed seriousness, of the theatricalisation of experience", the modern Foreign Legion as seen in *Beau Travail* – policing old combat zones, offering up its rigour and grace to indifferent wildernesses, practising permanent priapic readiness for a physical engagement that never comes – is the very quintessence of military camp. (In its sly acknowledgement of the queer interpretations that strain so unavoidably at the seams of military imagery, *Beau Travail* might be construed as a solemn foreign relative of the Monty Python sketch in which marching soldiers chant arch taunts: "Don't come the brigadier bit with us, dear/We all know where you've been, you military fairy...")

Male identity

Desire, then, may form part of Sergeant Galoup's crisis, but the concerns of Denis's film reach beyond sexual acts or their refusal. At the time *Beau Travail* came out, angst around the matter of male identity – specifically, the post-feminist, post-industrial fear of redundancy and impotence, and the resulting querying of sexual and social identity – had considerable cinematic currency. The US cinema of 1999, for instance, repeatedly problematised the conventions of male heroism and male self-sacrifice. *American Beauty* and *Eyes Wide Shut* show groomed and affluent mid-life males thrust into confusion by consumerist decadence and aggressive female autonomy. *Fight Club* gives us men voluntarily cloistered away from women, the better to sublimate their emotions into physical exertion and violence (and has its own *Billy Budd* moment, when the narrator disfigures a gorgeous blond recruit on the basis that "I felt like destroying something beautiful"). Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr Ripley* envies and desires Dickie Greenleaf, and becomes murderous as a result.

Denis's choice of the French Foreign Legion as a setting for *Beau Travail* originated in a commission from the television channel Arte to make a film on the theme of foreignness, but it can also be seen to reflect this prevailing millennial concern over male and female place and function. Submitting stoically to suffering, severing emotional connections, rejecting domesticity and blood family: the French Foreign Legion offers an escape fantasy neatly tailored to the popular stereotype of the masculine temperament. Denis's film acknowledges, not least in its title, the sad glamour that has adhered to the French Foreign Legion since P.C. Wren's 1924 novel *Beau Geste* popularised the perception of the legionnaire as tragic hero rather than mere runaway criminal; but it also supports the notion that all-male environments harbour obscure and inevitable threats. Sexual desire is reconfigured as the threat of dominance, violation and

When 'Beau Travail' came out, angst around the matter of male identity had cinematic currency

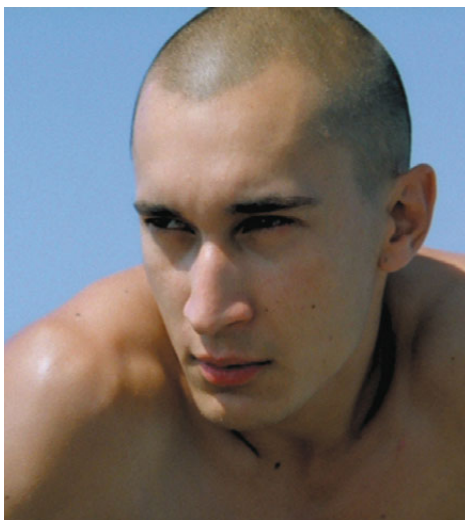
feminisation; the hope of reproduction dies; love, rendered inexpressible by taboo, turns toxic. (Four years after *Beau Travail*, Gaspar Noé would begin his *Irreversible* in the supposed 'hell' of two all-male spaces – a prison and a gay nightclub – and end it in the hope-suffused 'heaven' of a pregnant woman alone in nature.)

Impotence in the face of social change is further emphasised in the imagery of near-defunct colonial outposts, whose continued existence both indicates the survival of a colonial legacy and emphasises its collapse. Military power, like the sexual energies of the recruits, is in abeyance, but continues to inform interaction with the African populace. Denis – herself a child of the French colonial experience, having moved around Africa as a child with her government-administrator father – shows the locals observing the legionnaires with amused curiosity rather than suspicion or awe. To the local girls they hit on at the disco, the legionnaires are suppliers of sex and gifts: part of a satisfying system of exchange, but hardly a source either of threat or salvation.

Of course, the fact that Denis is herself a woman – and was working in this case with a female cinematographer and editor, Agnès Godard and Nelly Quettier respectively – further complicates *Beau Travail*'s position on masculinity. Denis has been criticised for appropriating a perspective not her own – that of a closeted gay man – and then associating that perspective with negative traits: envy, asociality, destructive and self-destructive drives. But the assumption that *Beau Travail*'s prominent enjoyment of the male physique

SACRIFICIAL VICTIM

As in Herman Melville's *'Billy Budd'*, on which the film is loosely based, it's the beauty and essential goodness of Sentain that bring misfortune down on him



constitutes an effort to replicate a gay male gaze risks negation of the existence of an active female gaze. Since there's nothing 'homo-' about a woman regarding the male body, it might be argued that the sexual perspective of *Beau Travail* is straightforwardly erotic – and that some of the discomfort it has stirred is down to its unusual standing as a film about men primarily authored by women.

Frame of reference

A further significant tendency of 1990s cinema that's identifiable in the make-up of *Beau Travail* is referentiality. Denis's film is haunted by pre-existing texts: *Billy Budd*; Benjamin Britten and E.M. Forster's 1951 opera of the same, which surfaces in the film in snatches of half-heard music; poems by Melville, which Denis reportedly gave to her cast in lieu of a script; *Othello*, with its recognition of the savage potential of envy; Fassbinder's *Querelle*, which knitted elements of *Billy Budd* into its frankly erotic take on Jean Genet's novel *Querelle de Brest*; *Beau Geste* (itself famously filmed in 1939, with Gary Cooper) and its sequels *Beau Sabreur* and *Beau Ideal*, if only in their association of the word beau ('good' but also 'beautiful') with the Foreign Legion's traditional conflation of nobility and physical elegance.

Another significant antecedent is Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1960), from which *Beau Travail* appropriates snippets of dialogue as well as the whole character of Bruno Forestier (who's played in both films by Michel Subor). Godard's film is set during the French-Algerian war; if Forestier is the same character in *Beau Travail*, his presence in the French Foreign Legion might be construed as either penance or escape. Forestier in *Le Petit Soldat* is also the mouthpiece for Godard's famous maxim defining cinema as "truth 24 times per second"; authenticity of representation preoccupies him, and surely also complicates his presence in Denis's film.

Whatever else is implied by *Beau Travail*'s exhilarating and befuddling final sequence, in which Galoup dances alone in a mirrored nightclub to Corona's 'Rhythm of the Night', it certainly points at a final bid for personal freedom – if one that's ironically characterised by a cheesy club anthem and a mannered, self-regarding routine. Perhaps Galoup is dead (we've seen him stretched on his bed, revolver nearby; going over his notes might have been a way of setting his house in order pre-suicide). Perhaps, in imagining himself back at the nightclub in Djibouti, he has found release in recognising his own physical grace, instead of obsessing over that of Sentain: freedom through narcissism. Or perhaps he's imagining an out gay life, in the only terms that his limited life experience provides (start by imagining dancing in public; move on to the matter of actual sex later!).

At its close, *Beau Travail* is still inviting us to guess – to feel rather than learn the rhythms of its storytelling. It's this audacious looseness, this elegant unfixability, that keeps Denis's 'beautiful work' so fresh – and asserts it as one of cinema's most compelling and original meditations on the need for, and simultaneous resistance to, intimacy.



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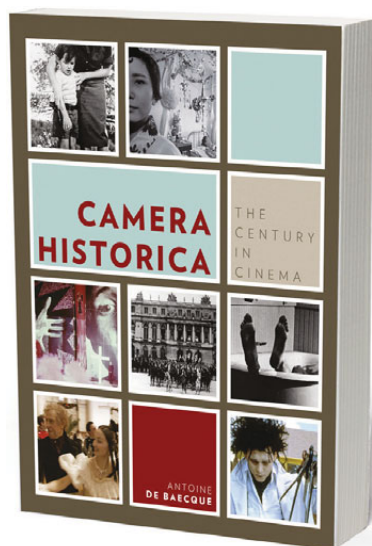
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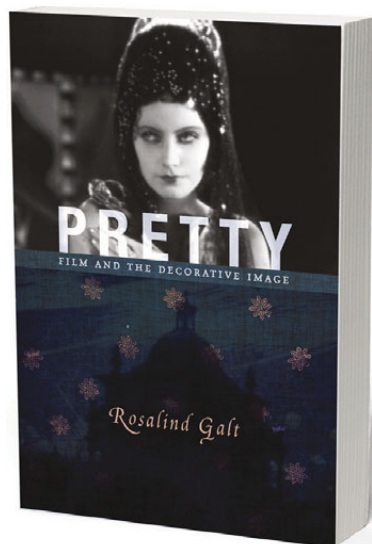
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In past 'S&S' polls, Jean Renoir's 'La Grande Illusion' has lost out to his later, allegedly more personal film 'La Règle du jeu'. It's time to reconsider, says **Ginette Vincendeau**

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Like all enduring classics, Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937) comes to us encumbered with a lot of baggage. A resounding success in its time, made by the most canonical French filmmaker of the interwar era, it has been laden with prizes, consistently screened and much written about. This is a film with a legend. Yet at the same time it has not been untouched by controversy, while its status in the film canon is less secure than it might seem. The release of a new digital print by StudioCanal is a good opportunity to look at the reception of this mythic work both in its 1930s context and via its fluctuating reputation since, as a test not just of how a great work can mean so many different things to different people at different times, but also of the variability of critical agendas.

La Grande Illusion follows French prisoners of war in two German camps during World War I. The core group of officers includes the working-class Maréchal (Jean Gabin), the aristocrat de Boeldieu (Pierre Fresnay), the wealthy Jewish bourgeois Rosenthal (Marcel Dalio) and the comic music-hall actor Cartier (Julien Carette). Their attempt to tunnel out of the first camp (Hallbach) is foiled at the last moment by a transfer to the forbidding fortress of Wintersborn (in real life the Haut-Koenigsbourg chateau in Alsace) where they meet again the German officer glimpsed in the film's prologue, Captain von Rauffenstein (Eric von Stroheim). From there, thanks to the sacrifice of de Boeldieu, Maréchal and Rosenthal finally escape. After being rescued by German widow Elsa (Dita Parlo), they eventually make it across the border to Switzerland.

An explicitly anti-war film, *La Grande Illusion* advocates human solidarity across national and class barriers: the French and German aristocrats bond over memories of Maxim's and horses while the lower ranks on both sides are unanimous in their opinion that the war has gone on too long.

Meanwhile the well-supplied Rosenthal shares food parcels with his comrades while de Boeldieu, knowing that his class is doomed, sacrifices himself to further the escape of his commoner fellow officers ("a nice present from the French revolution", von Rauffenstein remarks).

In its time

Shot in the winter of 1936-37 and released on 8 June 1937, *La Grande Illusion* was a combination of autobiography, humanist statement and political tract. It bore the marks of the Popular Front's left-leaning politics, in which Renoir had been closely involved; but with the Popular Front on the wane, those politics were already less clear-cut than in the director's three 1936 films *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, *Les Bas-fonds* and the Communist-sponsored documentary *La vie est à nous!*. A transitional film in this respect, before the *noir* pessimism of Renoir's 1938 Zola adaptation *La Bête humaine*, *La Grande Illusion* is about class solidarity rather than class struggle. Its pacifism makes sense against a backdrop of international tension marked by the mounting threat of fascism and world war. Equally importantly, it was part of the strong current of anti-war feeling in France in the wake of World War I. In French that war was known as '*la der des ders*' ('the last of the last') – and perhaps the most poignant of the multiple meanings of the title 'grand illusion' was the recognition that, sadly, it wouldn't be the last.

In the details of its narrative, *La Grande Illusion* was also autobiographical, based on Renoir's own memories of the war, in which he served as a pilot until he was shot down in April 1915 (Gabin wears Renoir's old uniform in the film). To his own recollections he added those of his friend Pinsard, another pilot. Trouble flared when Renoir and scriptwriter Charles Spaak failed to acknowledge that their screenplay also drew on Jean des Vallières's novel *Kavalier Scharnhorst*, leading to a plagiarism case. While there are

similarities between the book and the film, they remain relatively minor. More significant were Spaak's input and changes in the cast, especially the inclusion of von Stroheim and the consequent expansion of von Rauffenstein's part (Renoir greatly admired the Austrian as a director).

As Martin O'Shaughnessy details in his excellent 2009 book on the film, while there was a consensus about the brilliance of *La Grande Illusion* from the point of view of style and performances, critics tended to address its subject-matter: "Its success was never narrowly cinematic because of its direct and obvious connection with the pressing issues of its day." With the exception of a few right-wing writers – including fascist novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who in his book *Bagatelles pour un massacre* odiously berated the sympathetic portrayal of the Jewish Rosenthal – most critics liked the film. This consensus reflects both the film's artistic success and its ability to express contradictory points of view – for instance, while national barriers are criticised as artificial, the film also indulges in national stereotypes. With the exception of Germany, where it was banned as Goebbels's "cinematic enemy number 1", *La Grande Illusion* was a triumph on the international scene too. It managed to please both Fascist Italy and Franklin D. Roosevelt, winning a raft of prizes including the 'International Jury Cup' at Venice and the New York Film Critics' Circle award.

Much more controversial was the film's French reception on its reissue in 1946. The audience still loved it, but this time round the critics were far less enthusiastic. Some cuts were made to the scenes concerning Rosenthal, as well as to the romantic episode between Maréchal and Elsa. Renoir's adoption of US nationality in the same year may have accounted for some of the flak; but that aside, in the aftermath of World War II and the revelations of the Holocaust, three areas in particular appeared problematic: the film's





POLL COUNTDOWN

No. 3

BROTHERS IN ARMS

In the film by Jean Renoir, below, aristocratic French officer Pierre Fresnay, above right, plans escape with working-class comrade Jean Gabin, above left, but has more in common with German commandant Erich von Stroheim, nearest on facing page



pacifism; its view of war as steeped in chivalry, with sympathetic portrayals of 'good Germans'; and the representation of Rosenthal, which was now read as having anti-Semitic resonances. The latter issue gave rise to a long series of debates that still continue today, centred on whether or not the film's recourse to anti-Semitic stereotypes (Rosenthal as rich banker) and directly anti-Semitic remarks (Maréchal to Rosenthal: "I could never abide Jews") were meant as a critique of anti-Semitism. The other questions, however, quickly receded into the background. On the one hand, the heated political divisions that informed film criticism in France gave way to other agendas; on the other, the reconstruction of Europe soon made the film's pacifism and advocacy of *rapprochement* between nations seem relevant once again.

In and out of the canon

As it became detached from these polarised debates, *La Grande Illusion* was poised to start a different career as a classic. The 1950s saw the beginning of retrospective assessments of the history of cinema, marked by the appearance of a number of polls, in particular in Belgium in 1952 and 1958. Significantly, the 1952 list by the Brussels Cinémathèque and the 1958 list compiled on the occasion of the Brussels World Fair both included *La Grande Illusion* among the top ten (or 12) best films ever made. It's worth looking at this a little closer.

The only French film by a French director included in 1958 (at no.5), *La Grande Illusion* figured in a list topped by Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and also including Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*, De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Dreyer's *The Passion*

of *Joan of Arc*, von Stroheim's *Greed*, Griffith's *Intolerance*, Pudovkin's *Mother*, Welles's *Citizen Kane* and Dovzhenko's *Earth*. It's a list strong in great films with 'great themes', in keeping with the period's humanist ethos – something that would be disparaged by New Wave critics such as Claude Chabrol. Indeed, as a response *Cahiers du cinéma* offered its own list (compiled by Bazin, Chabrol, Godard, Rohmer, Rivette and Truffaut, among others) in December 1958. This was their choice: Murnau's *Sunrise*; Renoir's *La Règle du jeu*; Rossellini's *Journey to Italy*; Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*; Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*; Welles's *Confidential Report* (aka *Mr Arkadin*); Dreyer's *Ordet*; Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari*; Vigo's *L'Atalante*; von Stroheim's *The Wedding March*; Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* and Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*.

There are many things to say about the differences between the two lists, such as the choice by *Cahiers* of both more modernist films (*Journey to Italy*) and more intimate drama (*L'Atalante*). Suffice it here to point out (beyond *Cahiers'* typical provocation, replacing *Citizen Kane* with *Confidential Report*) the crucial shift from *La Grande Illusion* to *La Règle du jeu* – a momentous switch that would be echoed in many subsequent surveys, and notably in the ten-yearly *Sight & Sound* polls. There, only *La Règle du jeu* appears in the top ten (at no.10 in 1952, no.3 in 1962, no.2 in 1972, 1982 and 1992, and no.3 in 2002). Knocked out of the A list, *La Grande Illusion* ends up among the also-rans – for instance appearing at no.38 in the 2002 *Sight & Sound* critics' list. Similarly, *Cahiers du cinéma*'s 2008 list of '100 Greatest Films' includes *La Règle du jeu* at no.3 and *La Grande Illusion* at no.68. Many other



◀ examples could be quoted that all illustrate the same basic shift in critical tastes.

As Robin Wood remarked, “In the days when film’s importance was attributed to the importance of its subject, [*La Grande Illusion*] was widely regarded as Renoir’s masterpiece,” but with the advent of auteurism in the 1950s, “it came to be perceived as a less personal, less intimate and less complex work.” I agree with Wood that this is a misconception, but it’s worth looking more closely at the reasons why the new critical consensus arose and endured.

The ‘easy’ accessibility of *La Grande Illusion*, its balanced structure in three acts (Hallsbach, Wintersborn, Elsa), the complex yet apparently seamless cinematography and the presence of major stars all signal a harmonious, classic film, whose subject is cohesion between individuals and nations. By contrast, the more ‘de-centred’ aesthetics of *La Règle du jeu* echo its theme of social disintegration. Thus for Truffaut, the fact that *La Grande Illusion* “is perhaps the least eccentric of all of Renoir’s French movies” is a reason to dampen his praise. When we add the presence of serious subject-matter – of a ‘great theme’, in Chabrol’s terms – we can almost see traces of New Wave accusations against the ‘tradition of quality’. Hence Truffaut also downplays *La Grande Illusion* for “serving a patriotic theme”.

La Grande Illusion’s popular success (it was the top-ranking film of 1937 at the French box office) is also a factor. In the Renoir canon, a legend has grown around *La Règle du jeu*’s supposed hostile reception in 1939. This has been shown by Renoir scholars Claude Gauteur and Christopher Faulkner to be a vast exaggeration, but the legend has endured that the film was ‘misunderstood’ at the time of its release, adding to its mystique and prestige. As Peter Wollen has pointed out, today’s highly ranked films like *Citizen Kane* and *La Règle*

LOVING THE ENEMY

Scenes of romance between escaped POW Gabin and a German widow (Dita Parlo, centre) were cut when the film was rereleased in France after the Nazi occupation

du jeu have the added aura of *films maudits*. This is not the case for *La Grande Illusion*, which along with *Les Bas-fonds* and *La Bête humaine* did very well commercially. Not coincidentally, all three starred Gabin, the leading French star of the time.

The use of actors is another key factor in the subsequent reputation of the film within the Renoir canon, for two reasons. First, another Renoir legend (initiated by Bazin) is that one of the director’s hallmarks was to use actors ‘against the grain’ – so for instance in *La Règle du jeu* there are relative unknowns (Nora Gregor), non-professionals (Renoir himself) or actors deliberately out of their expected register (Roland Toutain, a comic, as the tragic aviator Jurieux). In *La Grande Illusion*, on the contrary, the stars all work brilliantly within their registers – and consequently met with public approval. Gabin, Fresnay, Dalio and Carette, among others, give fabulous performances that were valued not just by the audience but by Renoir himself. As he said, “Each time I see the picture, I’m impressed by one idea. It is that you don’t do anything with bad actors... I know that I owe so much to the actors.”

The second point is the question of stars and authorship. Renoir’s happy sharing of the credit with his actors did not fit well with the

auteur theory that advocated the director’s single vision. At the level of production, Gabin was instrumental in getting the film off the ground. At the level of reception, while Renoir was recognised and rewarded as the director of *La Grande Illusion*, the film was also seen as a great ensemble piece and, for a significant part of the audience, a ‘Gabin film’. By contrast, in those terms, *La Règle du jeu* cannot be anything but a ‘Renoir film’.

It’s clear that the critical debates that have shaped the reception of *La Grande Illusion* are, as ever, historically grounded. The film has ridden waves of critical approval and disapproval, yet through them continued to meet popular success. As a viewer’s comment on IMDb put it when *La Grande Illusion* dropped out of the website’s top 250 films in 2010 (typically, comparing it to *La Règle du jeu*), “This is a film that you can both appreciate AND enjoy!” While the immediate topic of the film is a specific war, the virulent debates in 1946 show its significance to a later war – and, consequently, its ability to speak to us today; issues of war, class and national conflicts have, sadly, not lost their relevance. In its ensemble perfection, *La Grande Illusion* is also a snapshot of French cinema of the late 1930s at its absolute best. It is a classic in the terms defined by Frank Kermode: that is, a film not frozen in time, but open to different readings across times and cultures. In all these senses, then, Bazin’s verdict is as true today as it was when he wrote it in the late 1950s: “It is not enough to say that it has retained its power... the stature of the film remained undiminished by the passage of time.”

After World War II, the film’s pacifism and portrayals of ‘good Germans’ appeared problematic

■ ‘*La Grande Illusion*’ is rereleased in a new print on 6 April, and plays until 19 April as part of a Jean Gabin season at BFI Southbank, London, before coming out on Blu-ray on 23 April



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Timo Vuorensola's Finnish comedy 'Iron Sky' is only the latest in a long and dishonourable tradition of films that find sci-fi thrills and bizarre humour in the extrapolation of Nazi scientific theory to its illogical conclusion. By **Kim Newman**

MOON KAMPF



One of the wittiest jokes in the Finnish science-fiction comedy *Iron Sky* has schoolteacher Renate Richter (Julia Dietze) illustrate Hitler's benevolence by showing her predominantly blonde, blue-eyed class one of the Earth's "most beloved short films", *The Great Dictator*. The sequence of Charlie Chaplin's Adenoid Hynkel playing with a balloon globe of the Earth is used to demonstrate Hitler's supposed fond wish that the planet be united in loving harmony. Several generations after a Nazi migration to the Dark Side of the Moon via flying saucer in 1945, Renate has been brought up to believe in – and embody – a version of fascism that is all about health, happiness and decency, ignoring the rest of the package (which, naturally, still persists at higher levels for plot purposes – imagine if the Nazis came back and were the good guys?). Later, on Earth for the first time, she sees the unexpurgated *Great Dictator* (1940) and realises she has been told lies all her life, but is still shocked that Chaplin was making fun of the *Führer* and thinks that it's too long. *Iron Sky* couldn't cope with how the character might react if she saw *Shoah* or *Schindler's List*. Just as Renate's version of Nazi history comes without a Holocaust, the only references to *Untermenschen* policy in the movie come in a weak subplot about a black astronaut (Christopher Kirby) deracinated by literal lunatic science, who spends much of the film as an annoyed albino.

In production for some years, Timo Vuorensola's film commands attention with its strikingly well-designed science-fictional Nazi imagery: vast space-faring Zeppelins; iron flying saucers (at the dawn of the watch-the-skies scare, it was assumed UFOs were secret weapons manufactured by an Earthly power, as in

The Flying Saucer, 1949); a swastika-shaped lunar colony; Volkswagens on the moon; gas-masked shock troops bestriding craters; a *meteorblitzkrieg* as chunks of space debris are towed by rocket ships and slingshot at the Earth. Made on a fraction of a Hollywood effects budget, these scenes stand up beside anything in the recent *Star Wars* films. Considering how far the art has come since 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), it's as if pyramids that once required armies of slaves, the gold reserves of a nation bigger than Finland and a visionary of pharaonic megalomania in order to be built can now be put up by DIY hobbyists with weekends to spare and a small-business loan.

It's a pity that there's no concomitant easy access to genius, for *Iron Sky* quite often demonstrates the old saw that few things are as difficult as writing comedy in your second language. And this despite the fact that Nazis are a comedy gift. Like the British propagandists who recut Nuremberg rally footage to the tune of 'The Lambeth Walk', Chaplin realised that Nazis – with their pantomime dress-up uniforms and love of erectile salutes and shouted slogans – were terribly funny. George Formby, who punched Hitler in *Let George Do It!* (1940), months before Captain America did the same thing on a famous comic-book cover, and Will Hay, a schoolmaster perturbed by Hitler Youth idiots in *The Goose Steps Out* (1942), also poked fun, even as Nazi Germany

implemented policies that would eventually (and temporarily) wipe the smile off everyone's face. Comedy Nazis resurfaced as a staple in sitcoms (*Hogan's Heroes*, 'Allo 'Allo) and sketches, all the way down to Mitchell and Webb's pertinent skit in which German officers on the Eastern Front consider the skull insignia on their caps and are forced to wonder, "Are we the baddies?"

Though it starts from a witty vision of an isolated, lunar Nazi colony with misguided ideas about the Earth and modern history, and prissy idiot Wolfgang Kortzfleisch (Udo Kier) as *Führer*, *Iron Sky* detours into aiming its satirical missiles elsewhere. The film has been in production so long that some of its best jokes are now backlist items – like the North Korean delegate mocked in the UN when he claims that the unidentified attacking spacecraft were personally designed and built by his "great leader". Making the American president in 2018 (Stephanie Paul) a caricature of Sarah Palin also lags behind the arrival of newer, scarier, more absurd Republican hopefuls than the former governor of Alaska, though there is a truncated, promising thread about her adoption of unvarnished Nazi speechmaking and imagery as part of a credible re-election campaign.

As to where real evil now lies in America, there's a shot-for-shot recreation of the Bruno Ganz Hitler-meltdown scene from *Downfall* (2004), famous for being resubtitled over and over in a series of YouTube japes about petty complaints. (Among the funniest of those are the ones that have Hitler infuriated by the omission of the space squid from the film of *Watchmen* and the announcement that the next episode of *Doctor Who* is called 'Let's Kill Hitler'.) Here the incendiary leader taking off glasses with shaking hands and screaming at trembling subordinates is spin doctor Vivian Wagner (Peta Sergeant), who

Manifestly evil, without an anti-defamation league to argue their case, Nazis are villains of choice



falls for would-be *Führer* Klaus Adler (Götz Otto) and is inspired to use the stirring propagandist methods of the Fourth Reich to sell her know-nothing, stands-for-nothing president, a woman who'd authorise a moon mission only to put up election posters in outer space.

Mad science

During World War II, Nazi mad scientists in the movies were devoted to raising armies of the undead (*King of the Zombies*, 1941; *Revenge of the Zombies*, 1943), but these were trumped when news got out of the all too real experiments conducted in concentration camps by the likes of Josef Mengele. After the initial shock died down, many horror/sci-fi films tapped into the mythology of Nazi mad science (with an especial proliferation of Nazi zombies) – and *Iron Sky*, in its casting of Udo Kier and use of a significant passage from Wagner, evokes the Hitlerian Baron Frankenstein of Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973). Uniformed goons and monstrous fascist freaks strut through the likes of Herbert J. Leder's *The Frozen Dead* (1966), David Bradley's *They Saved Hitler's Brain* (aka *The Madmen of Mandoras*, 1963), Ken Weiderhorn's *Shock Waves* (1979), Jean Rollin's *Zombies' Lake* (*Le Lac des morts vivants*, 1981), Jesús Franco's *Oasis of the Zombies* (*L'Abîme des morts vivants*, 1981), Joel M. Reed's *Night of the Zombies* (1981), Michael Mann's *The Keep* (1983), Steve Barker's *Outpost* (2008) and Tommy Wirkola's *Dead Snow* (*Død snø*, 2009). Cloned Hitlers feature in Franklin J. Schaffner's *The Boys from Brazil* (1978), and every time-travel/paradox show on TV has to play with history at some point. Last year, both *Doctor Who* and *Misfits* did a 'Let's Kill Hitler' show.

Most of these play with relatively small-scale fantasies: *Iron Sky* is almost the first film to tap –

NEW ORDER

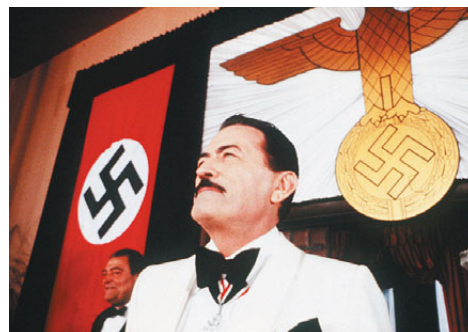
Teacher Renate Richter (Julia Dietze, left) with Klaus Adler (Götz Otto, right), who plans to take over as moon Führer from Wolfgang Kortzfleisch (Udo Kier, far left)

as Ted Nomura's manga-look comic-book series *Luftwaffe 1946* does – into the wilder, after-the-war ambitions of a Third Reich which took seriously bizarre pseudo-science like the hollow Earth theory, the possibility that the moon was made of ice and the occult experiments of the Thule Society. The rocket enthusiasts of the V-weapon programme tried to realise the engineering miracles envisioned by 1920s/30s German science-fiction films by Fritz Lang (*Metropolis*, *Woman in the Moon/Die Frau im Mond*), Curtis Bernhardt (*Der Tunnel*) and Karl Hartl (*Gold, F.P.1 antwortet nicht*).

This brand of jackboot fantasy has begun to seep into a run of comic-book movies, including Guillermo del Toro's *Hellboy* (2004) and Joe Johnston's *Captain America* (2011) – both of which feature giant, clanking mystical-scientific Nazi devices intent on world domination or

MAD SCIENTIST

Gregory Peck as Hitler-cloning Josef Mengele in 'The Boys from Brazil', a rare A-list entry in the genre



destruction. *Iron Sky*'s hook-up between 1940s fascism and US Tea Party conservatism has even been gazumped by one of the lowliest of entries in the cycle, the porn parody *Captain America XXX* (2011). Here, the Red Skull not only backs Sarah Palin's presidential campaign but has a lengthy sex scene with her to prove it.

It may just be that – as is always remembered in complicated times – the Nazis still make the best baddies, even decades after the war. The rash of Fourth Reich/highly-placed-war-criminal movies of the 1970s (*The Odessa File*, *Marathon Man*) and the resurgence in serial-style kraut-biffing in the Indiana Jones films both take advantage of the fact that Aryan insistence on racial purity allows Nazis to be caricatured, despised and mown down in movies in a way no longer possible with Apaches, Mexicans, Fu Manchu's hordes or spear-waving Zulus (or indeed Islamic fundamentalists, without prompting howls of outrage).

Absurd, manifestly evil, without an anti-defamation league to argue their case, unspeakably atrocious in their history and behaviour and – as the *Iron Sky* president notes – the only people America “has ever beaten in a fair fight”, the Nazis are likely to remain villains of choice in fantasy action-adventure. The fact that fascism was wedded to a design genius that remains queasily appealing – even those skull insignia and especially that crooked cross (which *Iron Sky* remembers Indians wear too) – is just good fortune for those with vast canvases to populate with pixels. So, even if Vuorensola's film is ultimately more impressive in snippets than as a whole, its high concept – Moon Nazis! – is hard to resist.

■ '*Iron Sky*' is released on 20 April, and is reviewed on page 69

What is Winnipeg's most famous director Guy Maddin up to with ectoplasm in the basement of the Pompidou Centre? **Jonathan Romney** goes to Paris to pay his respects to 'The Seances Project', where lost or aborted movies are being brought back to life

A CANADIAN IN PARIS



Two men stand in a Japanese potter's studio, bound at the wrists with rope. A young woman lies on a chaise longue, a gauzy veil emerging from her mouth, while another is draped over a boy lying on a table, over whom Udo Kier – in dark glasses and drooping Fu Manchu moustache – makes portentous, cabalistic hand movements. Onlookers gaze down at the action from a gallery, some staying to watch raptly, others losing interest after a while and drifting off. After all, this is Paris, and no-one is that surprised to see a film shoot in progress.

But this isn't exactly a film shoot, more like a spiritualist ceremony. Its aim is to summon up from oblivion the shade of a long-lost film – Mizoguchi Kenji's 1923 melodrama *Resurrection of Love* (*Ai ni yomigaeru hi*). What we're seeing today in Paris's Pompidou Centre is a resurrection rather than a remake, and the medium presiding over it is Canadian director Guy Maddin. The Mizoguchi film is only one of 17 that Maddin is filming, one a day, in public in the Pompidou Centre basement. This series of *Spiritismes*, as they're billed here, is part of a longer programme of hauntings – 'The Seances Project' – in which

Maddin proposes to invoke the phantoms of 136 films, each one lost, forgotten or, in some cases, planned but never made.

Maddin has often channelled bygone film styles in his wildly idiosyncratic work, and created some flamboyantly arcane hybrids – among them the oneiro-autobiography *My Winnipeg* (2007), the ballet film *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002) and the peepshow installation that was the original format for his film *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003). But 'The Seances Project' is new ground for Maddin. For one thing, it's primarily an internet rather than cinema project; for another, it's a long-term undertaking, rather than being conceived with a specific end result in mind (although a feature may eventually emerge).

In fact *Spiritismes* is as much performance or installation as filmmaking exercise. The point of Maddin's Paris residency (which took place over three weeks in February and March) is that people can walk in and watch the shoot for free. Each day's title is shot digitally on a Sony F3 by DP Benjamin Kasulke, with additional smaller cameras sometimes wielded by Maddin and his wife, American critic Kim Morgan. Each day's shoot is streamed live – and eventually, Maddin explains, the edited films will end up online so

that viewers can hold their own virtual seances: "You may attempt to invoke one film but you'll get another one, and the various ghosts will start talking together and interrupting each other."

In Paris, an extraordinary cast changes every day. Among the names are Geraldine Chaplin, Charlotte Rampling, Maria de Medeiros, Jacques Nolot, Mathieu Amalric and up-and-comers Ariane Lebed (*Attenberg*) and Adèle Haenel, recently in Bertrand Bonello's *House of Tolerance*. Udo Kier appears in no fewer than 12 consecutive Paris shoots, and will accompany the project on its travels this year and next, to Maddin's native Winnipeg, São Paulo and finally New York's MoMA. On set, Kier is performing a trance: he has taken off his glasses and somehow, uncannily, made his eyes go foggy grey, as if he were blind or temporarily possessed. A curtain of gauze hangs out of his mouth, representing that spiritualist's stock material, ectoplasm. "Udo's kind of holding it together for us," Maddin tells me between takes. "He's the most open to ectoplasmic suggestion."

The list of directors Maddin is 'channeling' in Paris (to use the term technically, for once) is as extraordinary as the cast. Shooting a film a day, he's attempting concise reimaginings – rather than recreations – of films once made by Jacques



Feyder, Lois Weber and William Wellman, as well as more *recherché* directors including Denmark's George Schnéevoigt (*Gardener Boy Sought*, 1913) and Romanian-born poet Benjamin Fondane (*Tararira*, Argentina, 1936). Also included are recreations of projects planned but never filmed by Dovzhenko, Hitchcock, Vigo and von Stroheim. The wider 'Seances' series will include Bolivian, Yiddish and Filipino titles; works by Guy Debord, Leni Riefenstahl and Kenneth Anger; even a lost James Mason TV series...

Looking at the list of films and their synopses, you suspect a hoax, given how closely they resemble the outré imaginings that are Maddin's speciality. Are we seriously expected to believe in a Naruse Mikio film called *The Strength of a Moustache* (*Hige no chikara*, 1931), in which a young man wears a duplicate of his absconded father's whiskers in order to save his blind mother from heartbreak? Or *Bits of Life* (Marshall Neilan, 1921), in which a deaf barber miraculously has his hearing restored, only to hear the world as an incoherent buzz?

But Maddin assures me that every one of these films is a genuine lost or aborted title. These ghostly "narratives with no known resting place", as he calls them, had to be reconstituted from

REINCARNATIONS

Udo Kier, right, in 'Poto Poto' with Maddin's wife Kim Morgan; Victoire du Bois, top, in 'The Blind Girl'; Maria de Medeiros, opposite, in 'The Strength of a Moustache'

the sparsest documentary evidence. "Sometimes there's a lot, sometimes there's nothing," he says. "Sometimes there's just a title, sometimes a title and one publicity still, sometimes a bunch of stills and a script." In the case of today's Mizoguchi, he explains, "I'm working with a one-paragraph synopsis that I found in a book and had translated from Japanese by Google – with all of its mistakes."

The word '*séance*', Maddin points out, is the standard French term for a film screening: "I thought, why not put actors into a trance and write these films to possess the bodies of me, the director, and the actors?" Hence the extraordinary ceremony that begins these daily shoots, to summon up the spirit of the original film and its physical language. When I arrive just after midday, all the actors (Kier, Hanel, Grégory Gadebois and Robinson Stévenin) are waving their hands in the air. Kier, vomiting ectoplasmic gauze, gestures in a way that suggests he's throwing invisible pots – which is exactly what he's doing, as he's playing a master potter. Maddin,

who these days sports a shaggy grey beard, calls out, directing the choreography: "Try something asymmetrical – the vomity speed can be a little more tight... Rotating, rotating a little faster, that's it... Robinson spinning now..." Maddin looks on appreciatively: "All the hands are in the air... It's like a Snoop Dogg concert!"

The essential thing, Maddin says, is that he's raising the spirits of the films, rather than of their directors: "I won't insult anyone's intelligence by attempting a lame-ass impersonation of Murnau or von Sternberg. If I worked my whole life I couldn't even impersonate one of them properly, never mind one per day." This is a project of the imagination, after all. "I'm no film scholar, I'm an avid dilettante," he insists. "Whatever I happen to know, or conjecture, is good enough for me. It's a seance, not a congressional hearing."

The series results from an extensive period of research and a marathon commitment in writing from Maddin and his co-writers. One unlikely script collaborator is leading American poet and master of opacity John Ashbery. Maddin learned that the poet had attended several of his screenings; they were put in touch by a mutual friend, and Ashbery began his part in *Spiritismes* by writing the screenplay for a lost sexploitation



◀ film of the 1930s, Dwain Esper's *How to Take a Bath*. He also supplied some 80 pages of dialogue from an unproduced play "collaged from old *New York Times* obituaries and Hollywood fan mags. We're placing it very carefully," Maddin says, "surgically laying it into place."

A seance a day

I take a break from the set to visit the rest of the Nouveau Festival, an annual Pompidou arts event of which *Spiritismes* is part. There's an exhibition inspired by ventriloquism, two separate and distinctly unsettling installations by US novelist Dennis Cooper and artist Giséle Vienne, and what's described as a "fantasy exhibition about the abstract as a journey through time and space" (only in Paris...). But Maddin, who's barely emerged from the basement, hasn't set eyes on any of it.

The same goes for Udo Kier, who admits that for the first week of shooting he didn't realise there was an artists' entrance, and spent every morning queuing with the public to get into the building. Kier is now in the unusual position of being *acteur-fétiche* to not one but two wayward auteurs. A long-time linchpin of Lars von Trier's universe, he's now been absorbed into Maddin's

OUT OF THE PAST

Jacques Nolot in 'Gardener Boy Sought'. Other films awaiting the Maddin treatment. l to r: 'Water Rats of London', 'The Patriot', 'The Mountain Eagle'

world, and played a doctor in the director's recent ghosts-and-gangsters drama *Keyhole*.

Kier explains the daily routine to me: "We always meet at 12 o'clock and we do a seance in the old traditional style – we did some around a table, and our hands are meeting, and the spirit is the script. First we do the seance, then we do ectoplasm in a different way – it comes out of the mouth or out of any opening of our body, and it goes from one person to another. And then we do the story of the day."

Back on set as Mizoguchi's master potter Wnno, Kier – moustache turned upwards now – is scattering rose petals to bless the union between

'I won't insult anyone's intelligence by attempting a lame-ass impersonation of von Sternberg'

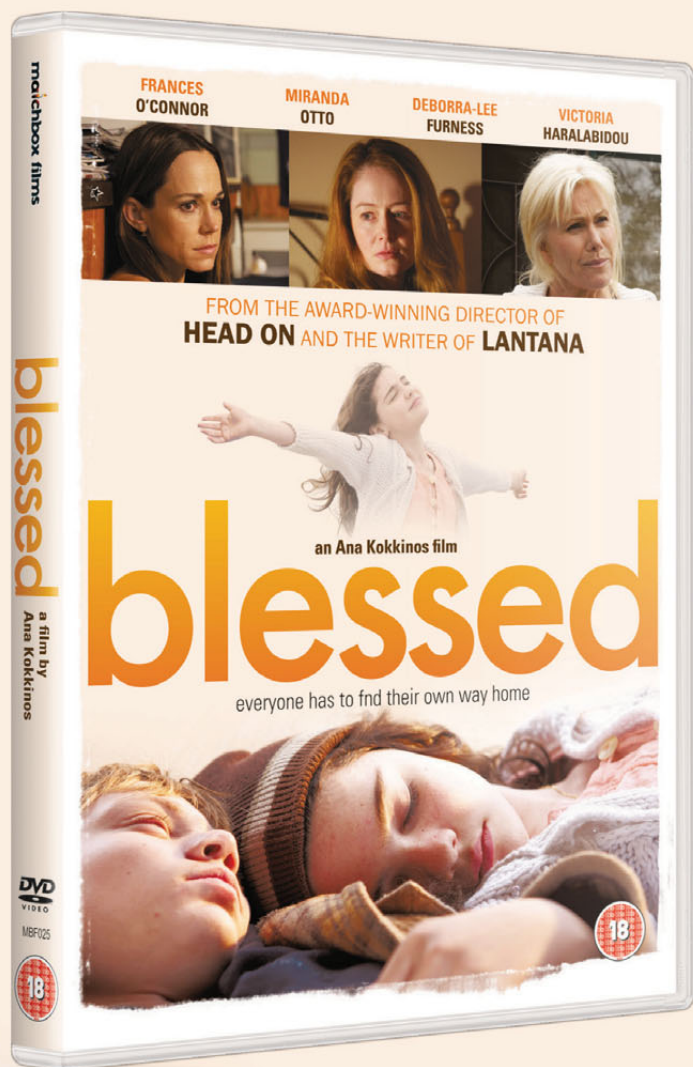
his daughter (Haenel) and a suitor (Gadebois). The basic decor resembles a gloomy Victorian parlour, but it can be modified daily; a well-stocked prop room includes stuffed geese and foxes, an old horn gramophone, assorted antique pots and bottles. Today the set is embellished with vases and a Japanese mask; behind the potter's window is a digital back projection of the sea; the day's shoot continues with Haenel and Stévenin taking a suicide leap into the water, then standing behind a scrim and 'swimming' in silhouette.

Among the audience watching appreciatively is an elderly French lady who exchanges warm embraces with Maddin. She is Luce Vigo, film critic and daughter of the legendary Jean Vigo; she took part in *Spiritismes'* opening shoot: her father's unmade *Lignes de la Main*, an abstract visual poem about hands. She's dropped by today just to see how things are going, but it's an opportune visit: Maddin needs to get a photo of her, in the idiosyncratic style of *Spiritismes*.

"Are you up for some ectoplasm?" he asks. Cinema's undead spirits hover, bemused

■ *'The Seances Project'* is at the Winnipeg Art Gallery this summer, then at the São Paulo Biennial, and at MoMA, New York in 2013

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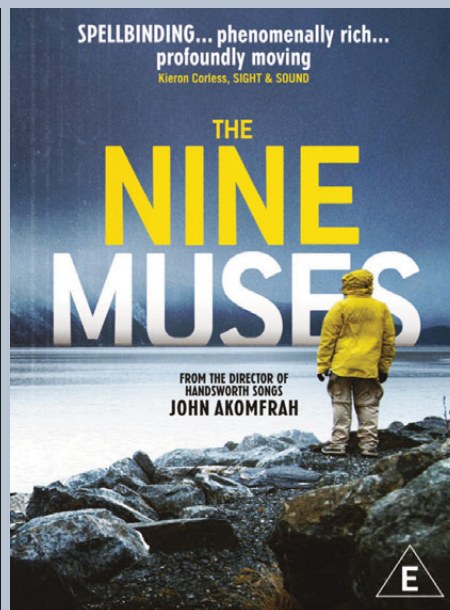
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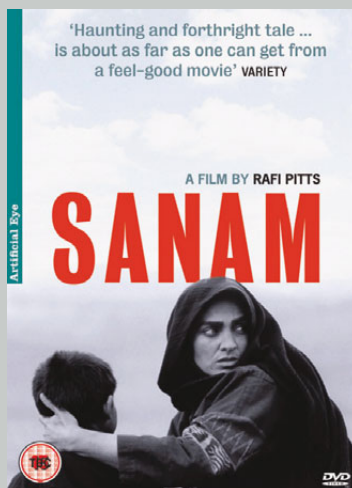
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The Pirates! Visually, Aardman Animations' lavish, hectic and immaculately finished pirate adventure is a joy, adroitly filling out its rich stop-motion world with judicious CGI embellishments **p77**

It's complicated...

*Girl meets boy, girl loses boy, girl meets older man... The new film by Mia Hansen-Løve confirms the promise of 'Father of My Children' with a frank – and very French – look at the pangs of young love, says **Philip Kemp***

Goodbye First Love

Mia Hansen-Løve, 2011

Leaving a Paris cinema, a young couple find themselves at odds over the movie they've just seen. She loved it: "The dialogue, the story, the characters – everything." He's vehement in his disagreement. "What a bad movie!" he rants. "It's so French! The actors are annoying. It's talky, complacent. I found it awful." It's tempting to suspect that, in devising this scene, Mia Hansen-Løve was ironically anticipating the kind of divergent responses her third feature would invite. If so, she was spot on. Screened at Telluride, Toronto, New York, Locarno and Glasgow, the film has had critics split between enchanted and exasperated.

Hansen-Løve has described *Goodbye First Love* (the French title is the less valedictory *Un Amour de jeunesse*) as the third and final entry in an autobiographical trilogy. *Tout est pardonné* (2007) followed the break-up of a couple caused by his drinking and drug addiction, observed chiefly through the eyes of their daughter. Her international breakthrough *Father of My Children* (*Le Père des mes enfants*, 2009) was inspired by the 2005 suicide of the independent producer Humbert Balsan (who initially planned to produce *Tout est pardonné*); here too the focus of the narrative finally settles on the producer's eldest daughter. Hansen-Løve's latest film borrows elements of her adolescent experiences, while the relationship between protagonist Camille and older professor Lorenz could be taken as reflecting that between Hansen-Løve and her partner and mentor, the director Olivier Assayas, 26 years her senior.

In the film, though, this relationship is secondary to the on-off affair between Camille (Lola Créton) and her first boyfriend Sullivan (Sebastian Urzendowsky). They're the couple we see arguing about the movie, and it's this dispute that occasions Camille's comment, "We don't have any tastes in common." To which she adds, "That doesn't stop me



The relationship between Camille and older professor Lorenz could be taken as reflecting that between Hansen-Løve and her partner, Olivier Assayas

loving you, though. I'll always love you, but I don't know why." The theme's hardly new – loving the wrong person, knowing that they're the wrong person, but being unable to stop yourself loving them – but Hansen-Løve treats it with a directness of gaze, an emotional and visual freshness that keeps it true and affecting.

The action spans three time-segments spread over eight years – unusually for this type of nostalgia-fuelled movie, there are no flashbacks and events are strictly chronological. In the first we see Camille and Sullivan as teenagers, sexually infatuated with each other, but with their love overshadowed by his imminent departure on an extended trip to South America. It ends with her suicide attempt after his final letter breaking up with her. Three years later, when Camille is an architecture student, she meets Lorenz, much older than her and midway through a divorce, but warm and emotionally stable in contrast to the mercurial, commitment-phobic Sullivan. Four years on, in a settled relationship with Lorenz and advancing fast in her profession, she meets Sullivan and their affair is

briefly rekindled, but once again he eventually backs off.

Right from the start, it's evident that the young couple's emotional registers are out of synch: each time Camille tries to express her need of Sullivan, he backs off. "We have all our lives to be serious – let's make the most of our youth," he tells her patronisingly. Inevitably, the more he pushes her away, the harder she tries to cling to him. At one point when they're staying alone together in her family's holiday home in the Ardèche, Sullivan makes dinner, but then ludicrously seats the two of them at either end of a long refectory table. Mid-meal Camille decides she's had enough of this distancing tactic, and comes crawling towards him on hands and knees along the bench beside

the table. There's something slightly spooky about the image; it feels like a moment out of Poe or M.R. James.

Hansen-Løve doesn't romanticise her young lovers; they do that themselves, striking self-consciously melodramatic poses and making half-joking pronouncements borrowed from the lexicon of doomed obsession. When Camille proposes cutting her hair short, Sullivan responds, "If you cut it, I'll leave you." "No," she counters, "because then I'd kill you, and myself as well." To her mother's tentative suggestion that Sullivan isn't perhaps ideal for her – and that in any case 15 is a little early to be making irrevocable life choices – Camille (living up to her name) replies in the high-flown, operatic mode of a 19th-century heroine. "He's the man of my life," she proclaims. "Love is the only thing that counts for me. It's my sole reason for living."

If Camille is self-dramatising, she's outdone by Sullivan when it comes to solipsism. The letter from Peru in which he breaks off their relationship furnishes a master-class in self-regarding insensitivity. "When I'm allowed to change I grow closer to myself," he announces. "But you won't let me get away. I look for you when I'm kissing someone else. Camille, I think I love you, but I want you to disappear" – which she duly almost does, attempting suicide with an overdose.

When we catch up with Camille three years later she's found a vocation in architecture, but her emotional life is on ice. She invites a boy back to her place only to refuse him sex, while a tutor comments that her design for a student-accommodation complex is fit only to be a monastery. It takes Lorenz (Magne-Håvard Brekke, who had a small role as the Lars von Trier-like director in *Father of My Children*) to thaw her on a trip to a Danish coastal resort. Water, at several points in the film, takes on an iconic, almost Renoiresque role, nearly always connecting with a key moment in Camille's development, a change in her life's flow. The swim





DON'T LEAVE ME THIS WAY
Dumped by first love Sullivan (Sebastian
Urzendowsky, above and below left),
Camille (Lola Créton, all pics) returns to
him during her later relationship with
Lorenz (Magne-Håvard Brekke, opposite)

in the Baltic heralds her liaison with Lorenz; twice she swims in the Loire (here a rippling hill-country stream, not the majestic expanse of the chateau region) – once with Sullivan and once, at the very end, alone; and when she and Sullivan meet again in the film's third segment, their strolls often take them beside the Seine as they try to resolve the cross-currents of their renewed relationship. (To underline the metaphor, Johnny Flynn and Laura Marling's "The Water" – "All that I have is a river" – features twice on the soundtrack.)

Another recurrent, more prosaic symbol is the straw hat Sullivan buys for Camille before they go to the country. She wears it there and at one point, sitting pensively on her bed, tosses it over a spider she sees crawling on the floor, as if wishing she could trap her emotionally elusive boyfriend as easily. Earlier Hansen-Løve has irised in and out on the hat to effect a transition – a rare stylistic flourish from a director who normally avoids foregrounding technique.

And in the final scene, when Camille swims in the Loire after Sullivan has broken with her yet again, the hat blows away and floats off downstream, suggesting that perhaps she's at last through with her infatuation.

Here – as at one or two other junctures (Camille and Sullivan riding bareback together on a chestnut horse) – the symbolism gets a little plonky. But for the most part the film flows with a limpid naturalism and charm, thanks not least to the lead performance of Lola Créton. True, Camille is often pouty and irritating – as what love-struck adolescent isn't? – but Créton (the child bride in Catherine Breillat's *Bluebeard*) plays her with an unforced warmth and an underlying determination that gain our sympathy. Sebastian Urzendowsky's Sullivan suffers by comparison, not all his lines ringing entirely true – though it could be argued that this is only fitting for an essentially untrustworthy character. But altogether the film effectively extends the range of one of France's most notable young directors – besides reminding those of us who once suffered the pangs of teenage love that we're very well out of it. *For credits and synopsis, see page 65*

A complex simplicity

Mia Hansen-Løve on her quest for truth in 'Goodbye First Love'

'Goodbye First Love' is the last part of a sort of trilogy that has formed itself spontaneously. My three films have several themes in common: survival after mourning or a separation, the passage of time, the strength of feelings, solitude and destiny. And also perseverance, learning to become oneself, and to be free. I just read this saying by Proust: "Where life closes round us, intelligence pierces an egress."

I attempt to express complex issues in a simple and direct manner. For this reason, I do not try to highlight the directing style, although the question of form is present throughout all my work. In addition, my three films expose certain contradictions, maintaining that these contradictions are essential; not only are they a part of life, but perhaps they also give life meaning. For example: Sullivan seems to be in love with Camille, yet he leaves her; Camille does and doesn't mourn Sullivan. Finally, she loves two men and finds some kind of balance within this imbalance.

I don't know how to paint, but I know that cinema often has things in common with painting: expressing what is invisible through images, attempting to find or reinvent a



MIA HANSEN-LØVE

singular and missing presence. Establishing a tone, a colour, a movement; making something that is ephemeral definitive. But what is specific to filmmaking is, for example, the choice of an actor, a line of dialogue, a frame, a cut, or the length of a shot; it is especially the outcome, the feeling that something has been embodied – this is the element from which I derive the most pleasure.

Finally, I have confidence that fiction can attain truth, as long as the fiction is a quest for finding one's own language. My grandmother, who hasn't seen my film yet, recently wrote me a letter citing Kierkegaard: "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." That is exactly what I wanted to say – and do – in this film.

Albert Nobbs

Ireland/France/USA/
United Kingdom 2011
Director: Rodrigo García
Certificate 15 113m 26s

Neat like its protagonist, Glenn Close's passion project *Albert Nobbs* brings to the screen George Moore's 1927 novella about a hotel waiter with a secret. Hitched to Close's fastidious performance as a woman impersonating a man in late-19th-century Dublin, the film smartly grants its title character the full measure of a personal peculiarity that transcends gender. The simply told story, as directed by women's-picture maven Rodrigo García (*Nine Lives*), is somewhat too cautious and constrained, though it does acknowledge Nobbs's powerlessness with a refreshing frankness.

For nearly two decades, Nobbs has been a respected member of the motley staff at Mrs Baker's hotel, which caters to a regular clientele of self-regarding gentry as well as a racier younger set. In her waiter's uniform, tightly holding her posture and facial expressions, the shy, pale waiter is respected and even liked by her unsuspecting co-workers, and appreciated for her attentiveness by the hotel's guests. What upsets Nobbs's scrupulous routine – part of which is to squirrel away tips to start her own business as a tobacconist – is



Skirting the issue: Aaron Johnson, Mia Wasikowska

the chance arrival of house painter Mr Page. Boarded with Nobbs, he catches on immediately. But brawny 'Mr Page' (a very good Janet McTeer) swiftly reveals to Nobbs her own identity as a woman, and her independence becomes an inspiration while also backlighting the fearfulness beneath the surface of Nobbs's charade.

Page's role as unofficial mentor buoys the film (and Nobbs) with her amused sense of humour, and rewardingly suggests a diversity among outsiders.

One notable feature of the drama is Nobbs's fixation on achieving respectability and stability, not some romantic realisation. When she pursues a hotel maid (Mia Wasikowska), it is with the pragmatic aim of building a household. The courtship is played up for its awkwardness and improbability (the maid is involved with a rough boilerman), but perhaps too underplayed is the depth of Nobbs's repression. Nobbs is a survivor through her impersonation, undertaken since a childhood trauma, but she remains stunted in her growth, capable of intense discipline and decency yet helpless in other ways.

Nobbs's extreme naivety may be a flaw in the character's conception, at odds with years of bearing witness to the behind-the-scenes behaviour of the hotel guests. Close plays this ignorance to the hilt and, as Nobbs, even wonders aloud about Page in monologic one-liners (reminding us of the role's origin for Close, in an award-winning 1982 New York stage adaptation). Somewhat startlingly done up in makeup and prosthetically altered ears, hair raked back, the star of the US TV show *Damages* bears closer resemblance to Robin Williams in *Bicentennial Man* (1999) than to her usual commanding screen self.

Originally released in the US for a one-week Academy-qualifying run last December, García's film is kept from Oscar-bait mediocrity by its game cast, especially McTeer, Brendan Gleeson as a house doctor and Pauline Collins as the vain Mrs Baker. Groaners remain, such as Page's anachronistic-sounding self-helper: "You don't have to be anything but who you are." But the more pressing problem of this diligent drama is the yearning it leaves for greater passion and complexity in its treatment.

◆ Nicolas Rapold

Angel & Tony

France 2010
Director: Alix Delaporte

French director Alix Delaporte's debut feature *Angèle & Tony* is set in a grey fishing village on the Normandy coast, and the brusque and halting romance of its namesakes – a troubled mother on parole and a portly, taciturn fisherman – is at one with the barebones lifestyle of the locals.

All hunched guardedness and darting glances, *Angèle* is played with a convincing mix of vulnerability and louche stubbornness by Clotilde Hesme. The film opens with her up against a street wall having a passionless quickie with a stranger, and it's soon clear that she grasps at reckless encounters as a salve for her difficulties with emotional intimacy. Fresh out of jail and desperately seeking work to help her regain custody of her young son Yohan, she takes up a job gutting fish for Tony (Grégory Gadebois), and moves into the spare room in his cramped cottage. Soon after they meet she makes an unprejudiced, crude attempt to initiate sex. After a second rebuffed come-on, he asks her if 'fuck' is the only word she knows. "Does it matter?" she responds.

While *Angèle*'s ruptured relationship with Yohan – who is living with his paternal grandparents and resents her prison absence – seems to be at the heart of her defensiveness and default nihilism, we're never let in on her murky past. While she admits that her husband's death prompted her prison term, she evasively terms it "an

SYNOPSIS Normandy, France, present day. Angèle, a mother on parole after two years in jail for an unspecified crime, has moved to a fishing village. Desperate for work, she answers a newspaper advertisement and is hired to help local fisherman Tony, who has recently lost his father at sea. Tony agrees to let Angèle lodge at his home, against the wishes of his mother Myriam, who lives with him. Tony rebuffs Angèle's repeated sexual advances, as he doubts her motives. Angèle's young son Yohan, who is living with her parents-in-law, is reluctant to see her. To help her custody case she lies to her parole officer, saying that she and Tony plan to marry. Angèle avoids being reported to the police when caught stealing a dress by a store attendant. Tony is arrested over fishing quota protests, but is released. Searches continue to locate the body of Tony's father at sea. Angèle and Tony kiss at a local festival. He finds out about her son, and that she has been in jail, but is unperturbed. Learning that marriage will help her custody case, he takes her to buy a wedding dress. At the hearing Angèle insists the judge let Yohan temporarily remain with his grandparents, so that he doesn't have to choose. Angèle and Tony wed, and visit the seashore with Yohan.

CREDITS

Produced by
Glenn Close
Bonnie Curtis
Julie Lynn
Alan Moloney
Screenplay
Gabriella Prekop
John Banville
Glenn Close
Story
Istvan Szabo
From a novella by
George Moore
**Director of
Photography**
Michael McDonough
Editor
Steven Weisberg
Production Designer
Patrizia von
Brandenstein
Music
Brian Byrne
Sound Recordist
Brendan Deasy

Costume Designer
Pierre-Yves Gayraud
**@Morrison Films/
Chrysalis Films**
**Production
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A Trillium Productions/
Mockingbird
Pictures/Parallel Films
production in
association with
Chrysalis Films/Allen &
Associates/WestEnd
Films with the
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and the participation of
Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/The Irish Film
Board
Produced with the
support of investment
incentives for the Irish
Film Industry provided
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Ireland
Developed with the

assistance of Bord
Scannán na hÉireann/
The Irish Film Board
Executive Producers
Cami Goff
John C. Goff
Sharon Harel-Cohen
Daryl Roth
David E. Shaw

CAST

Glenn Close
Albert Nobbs
Mia Wasikowska
Helen Daves
Aaron Johnson
Joe
Janet McTeer
Hubert Page
Pauline Collins
Mrs Baker
Brenda Fricker
Poly
Jonathan Rhys Meyers
Viscount Yarrrell

Brendan Gleeson
Doctor Holloran
Maria Doyle Kennedy
Mary
Antonia Campbell
Hughes
Emmy
Mark Williams
Sean
James Greene
Patrick

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

10,209 ft+0 frames

SYNOPSIS Dublin, the late 19th century. Albert Nobbs is a respected waiter at a small hotel and, secretly, a woman disguised as a man. When the hotel's owner Mrs Baker forces Nobbs to share her room with a jobbing house painter, the visitor, Mr Page, finds out the truth. 'Mr Page' not only keeps the secret but reveals that she, too, is a woman.

Nobbs makes a surprise visit to Page at her house and finds her living married with another woman. Inspired, Nobbs resolves to find a wife to help her realise her dream of running a tobacco shop. The object of her stiff courtship is Helen, a maid, who is already involved with a rough young boilerman, Joe, a new arrival at the hotel. Joe tells Helen to play along in order to extract gifts and money from Nobbs. A wave of typhoid fever strikes the hotel; Nobbs is taken ill, but recovers. Encouraged by Page, Nobbs fruitlessly raises the idea of marriage with Helen, who is now pregnant by Joe and frequently fighting with him.

One night Nobbs tries to break up a quarrel between Helen and Joe, and is flung against the wall. She returns to her room and dies in her sleep. The house doctor examines her and soon her true identity is known. Mrs Baker finds and takes Nobbs's hefty savings. Some months later, Page comes to do another job and surmises Mrs Baker's theft. It is suggested that Page will take care of Helen, now a mother and abandoned by Joe.

accident", and any details remain buried. With its backstory too thinly sketched, the film feels slight, and blocks us from deeper emotional involvement. Shorthand, emblematic strokes – such as Angèle arduously pedalling her bike along a stretch of country road, despite its flat tyre – lack subtlety and assist little in fleshing out this lone, stubborn battler's psychology.

What's more, the hard, sexually frank edge the film tries for can't disguise that it's a traditional love story with little memorable or challenging to offer in its vision of gender relations. Cynical opportunism initially seems to be what drives Angèle to throw herself at the physically much less attractive Tony – she's keenly aware that netting a husband would considerably boost her custody chances. Predatory gold-digger gives way to damsel-in-distress, however, as her need for tenderness responds to the promise of security offered by the straight-up, dependable Tony.

Obstacles in the path of the pair's love – Tony's distrustful mother and Angèle's economy with the truth – are not so weighty as to create doubt about the outcome. When the couple finally kiss it's backstage at a village festival: Angèle has been asked at the last minute to fill in as the witch in Snow White, and Tony is helping her rehearse lines about frozen blood. This clunky plot contrivance supports the notion that he has thawed a pathologically solitary woman – an idea all too easily reinforced by Angèle's selfless show of newfound empathy at a subsequent custody hearing. A fairytale by the end, perhaps, but regrettably far from a revisionist one. **Wally Hammond**

CREDITS

Producer

Hélène Cases

Screenplay

Alix Delaporte

Director of Photography

Claire Mathon

Editor

Louise Decelle

Art Director

Hélène Ustaze

Music

Mathieu Maestracci

Sound Recordist

Pierre Tucet

Costumes

Bibiane Blondy

©Lionceau Films

Production Companies

Lionceau Films present

with the participation of

Canal+, CinéCinéma,

Centre national du

cinéma et de l'image

animée and Sofica

Cofinova 6 a film by Alix

Delaporte

CAST

Clotilde Hesme

Angèle

Grégory Gadebois

Tony

Evelyn Didi

Myriam

Jérôme Huguet

Ryan

Antoine Couleau

Yohan

Patrick Ligardes

integration adviser

Patrick Descamps

grandfather

Lola Dueñas

Anabel

Dolby

In Colour

[L85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

French theatrical title

Angèle et Tony



Shiver my timbers: Deon Lotz, Charlie Keegan

Beauty

South Africa/France 2011

Director: Oliver Hermanus

Certificate PG 104m 43s

A sombre foray into modern 'social realism', Cape Town-born director Oliver Hermanus's second feature *Beauty* follows Shirley Adams, a claustrophobic study of the dissolution of a mother caring for her disabled son, and sets itself an equally challenging task: this time to portray the divided self of a dangerously conflicted and closeted though outwardly conventional middle-aged Afrikaner. Quite how much Hermanus's approach to his subject is informed by his declared admiration for the disciplined forms of social and psychological realism developed by such as the Dardenne brothers and the interiority and patient rhythms of the Mexican Carlos Reygadas is moot. But certainly the observational distance and atmospheric severity Hermanus applies throughout *Beauty* enable him to achieve a form of non-judgementalism that takes his film beyond the realms of ordinary social critique or psychological case study – or indeed gay miserabilism – into a territory which, for all its mundanity, is more truly sorrowful, pathetic and mysterious.

That mystery is excellently embodied in the form of Deon Lotz, a bull-necked actor with intimidating eyes which he uses so expressively to reveal the thoughts and emotions – born of an explosive mixture of repressed desire, misplaced calculation, disappointment, thwarted love and ambition – of his unsympathetic character François. It's symptomatic that the object of the middle-aged François's obsession – young lawyer Christian, played with a carefully judged ambivalent innocence by Charlie Keegan – never gives any indication that he is gay or responsive to François's obvious, if never explicitly stated, entreaties. This bull-neck is blindly bull-headed.

The director is nicely exact in the depiction of milieu – particularly in the carefully set-designed, digital widescreen-presented interiors – all

the better to suggest the particular brand of corrupting, hypocritical, macho, bullying, homophobic, racist and morally and socially marooned excesses of old, discredited Afrikanerdom that François simultaneously is prey to and, very credibly, represents. Does the film's mystery, then, reside in the very self-defeating nature of the reactionary distortions Hermanus shows us? (What use are they? Who do they profit? Why do men such as François adhere to them if they make them so deeply unhappy?)

Hermanus's film is not a despairing nor a hopeless one – nor is it a tragedy – though it does wind up with its fair share of loose ends, as well it might. (Social progress in the new South Africa, Hermanus seems to be saying,

is an inchoate process at best). In fact, for the first hour at least, the portrait it paints of sad, contorted François seems shockingly compassionate – and all the more intriguing for it. Even at the last – after he has descended to an act of devastating brutality – François is allotted his share of dignity, albeit seen lost and longing, a lone Peeping Tom in a corner café. It wouldn't be true to say that *Beauty* is a fully achieved film, but it is brave, promising and – for a South African feature – unusual. It will be very interesting to see what Hermanus – London Film School graduate and Roland Emmerich protégé – will deliver to us next, now that he has teamed up with *Beauty*'s French co-producer and co-writer Didier Costet.

Wally Hammond

CREDITS

Producer

Didier Costet

Scriptwriters

Oliver Hermanus

Didier Costet

Director of Photography

Jamie Ramsay

Editor

Oliver Hermanus

Production Designer

J. Franz Lewis

Music Composed and Produced by

Ben Ludik

Sound Mixer

Ian Arrow

Costume Designer

Reza Levy

©Moonlighting

Skoonheid

Productions/Equation

Production Companies

Didier Costet presents in

association with

Moonlighting Films a

film by Oliver Hermanus

A Moonlighting

Skoonheid

Productions/Equation

co-production

Produced with the

assistance of the

Department of Trade

and Industry South

Africa

Produced with the

financial support of The

Global Film Initiative

With the support of

Région Île-de-France

Executive Producer

Marvin Saven

CAST

Deon Lotz

François van Heerden

Charlie Keegan

Christian Roodt

Michelle Scott

Elena van Heerden

Albert Maritz

Willem Roodt

Sue Diepeveen

Marika Roodt

Roeline Daneel

Anika van Heerden

Drikus Volschenk

Cliff Engel

Morne Visser

Brian

Leon Kruger

Henri

Robin Smith

Gideon

Jeroen Kranenburg

doctor

Tinarie van Wyk Loots

Linda van Heerden

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

9,424 ft +8 frames

South African theatrical

title

Skoonheid

Being Elmo

USA 2011

Director: Constance Marks

The Muppets are having a moment, and Dogwoof is smartly taking advantage of it to release *Being Elmo*, a short, sweet and spirited documentary that premiered at Sundance last year. It brings us immediately into the world of Kevin Clash, better known (or unknown) as the body and voice of the furry red Muppet Elmo.

Taking its lead from Elmo's character, the film is warm and fuzzy but never floppy: it openly celebrates the importance of the unconditional love that is Elmo's MO, unashamedly showing grown men crying at puppets. Simultaneously, it credits its viewers with what Keats called 'negative capability' – the ability to believe in the Muppets and simultaneously be aware of their skilled construction and performance – not least when it reveals (wonderfully) that Frank Oz's 'hook' for performing Miss Piggy was to think of her as a transgendered truck driver. But then, as an early clip of Bert and Ernie breaking the fourth wall and addressing the viewer makes clear, *Sesame Street* (the show that first brought the Muppets widespread popularity) has always trusted its viewers' intelligence.

That Muppetry blend of smarts and sentiment perfectly fits Clash's journey from working-class Baltimore via high-school bullying and local cable to primetime TV. Aged nine when the show debuted in 1969, Clash recalls that he loved it because – unlike any other show on US TV at the time – it reflected his multi-ethnic neighbourhood, and "magnetised" him, immediately capturing his interest in puppeteering as a craft, by bringing together Jim Henson's liberal politics and his labour-of-love creations.

From the construction of Clash's first puppet (a monkey fashioned from his father's winter coat liner, leading to parental support rather than the expected punishment), the film refutes the cliché of the puppeteer's psychosis by demonstrating the passion of the artist. At least since Freud's take on automata and puppets in *The Uncanny*, western culture has seen puppeteers as manipulative and manic, as in *Being John Malkovich* (1999). But puppetry has recently seen a resurgence in British theatres with the success of the play *War Horse*, and *Being Elmo* explores both the craft and heart of turning foam and fur into sentience. Although



Muppeteer: Kevin Clash

Clash's rare success as a working-class African-American making it in the media is palpable, the film dispenses with the clichéd narrative of odds overcome in favour of tracking his delighted discoveries of Henson's secrets under the generous mentorship of Big Bird builder Kermit Love.

In that spirit, the film not only highlights Clash's work with the Make-a-Wish Foundation but also uses his infectious joy to democratise the skills of puppetry. It's telling that when he first performs with the Muppets, on the Sesame Street float at the Thanksgiving Day Parade, his greatest excitement is not the crowd, but discovering how to make his puppets seamless by using fleece and the 'Jim Henson stitch'. It's to the credit of this moving and engaging film and its affable subject that, in deconstructing the 'seamless' Muppets, it only increases their magic.

◆ Sophie Mayer

CREDITS

Co-directed by

Philip Shane

Produced by

Constance Marks

James Miller

Corinne Lapook

Written by

Philip Shane

Justin Weinstein

Director of

Photography

James Miller

Edited by

Philip Shane

Justin Weinstein

Music

Joel Goodman

Audio

Steven Robinson

Jeff Edrich

©Constance Marks

Productions, Inc.

Production

Companies

Submarine Deluxe and

Constance Marks

Productions

WITH

Kevin Clash

Whoopi Goldberg

Frank Oz

Cheryl Henson

Rosie O'Donnell

Joan Ganz Cooney

Caroll Spinney

Fran Brill

Martin P. Robinson

Bill Barretta

narrated by

Whoopi Goldberg

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Dogwoof

Onscreen title/

US theatrical title

Being Elmo

A Puppeteer's Journey



The outlaw within: Magaly Solier

Blackthorn

Spain/United Kingdom/

Bolivia/France 2010

Director: Mateo Gil

Certificate 15 102m 8s

Not many raindrops fall on people's heads in this low-key, elegiac, fitfully intriguing revisionist western, which posits that Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid were not in fact the bandits famously shot during a bank raid in the Bolivian town of San Vicente in 1908. Instead, Mateo Gil's film is set in dusty hamlets, parched desert and bleached salt flats, the authentic Bolivian locations offering most of its visual pleasures, the rest stemming from close-ups of Sam Shepard as retired horse-breeder James Blackthorn, whose true identity is clearly signposted (not least by the film's poster) well

before the big reveal. The playwright-actor has always been intensely photogenic, but age-lines and a grizzled beard have added a craggy monumentality to his features, as though he's part of the ancient surrounding landscape. He blends into it well, too, speaking fluent Spanish, in sharp contrast to the famous scene in George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) in which Paul Newman's Butch proves a hopeless linguist.

Prior familiarity with the earlier film, or at least the source history, is not so much recommended as assumed. Flashbacks to Butch and Sundance's past and several lines of dialogue rely on such recognition (the veteran bank robber says, "I can't remember ever being so well received in a bank before," on departing as a legitimate customer), as does the symbolic transfer of Butch's famous sheepskin-lined coat. So too does the initial situation of

SYNOPSIS A documentary about puppeteer Kevin Clash, creator of the Muppet character Elmo.

Clash grew up outside Baltimore, the son of a factory worker and a childminder, watching *Sesame Street* from its first broadcast in 1969. Inspired by the show and supported by his family, he created his own puppets and entertained neighbourhood children, gaining experience on local cable TV. Mentored by Kermit Love, who built Big Bird, Clash left for New York to become the Muppets' only African-American puppeteer. Having worked on the 1986 film *Labyrinth*, Clash found his voice with loveable red monster Elmo, the character most popular with young viewers and the embodiment of Clash's warmth and spirit.

SYNOPSIS Bolivia, 1927. The American James Blackthorn, long settled in a rural village, hears of the death of an old friend and decides to return home. He goes to Potosí to withdraw his savings and sell his horses. Returning with \$6,000, he is ambushed by Eduardo Apodaca. Blackthorn shoots back, but his horse runs off with the money. Apodaca claims that he was shooting at pursuers, and offers to share \$50,000 that he has stolen from mine-owner Simón Patiño and hidden in an abandoned mine. Blackthorn and Apodaca retrieve the money, and evade Patiño's posse after a shootout. Two posse members later find them in Blackthorn's house. The posse members are killed, but not before shooting Blackthorn and his Bolivian lover Yana, the latter fatally. Blackthorn and Apodaca traverse the Uyuni salt flats with the posse in hot pursuit. They shoot them all, but are separated. In Tupiza, Blackthorn consults a doctor. The doctor tells former Pinkerton detective Mackinley that Blackthorn may be the legendary Butch Cassidy. Mackinley – who has long suspected that Butch and the Sundance Kid were not in fact the bandits shot after trying to rob the San Vicente bank in 1908 – confirms Blackthorn's identity and notifies the Bolivian army, but then helps Blackthorn escape after revealing that Apodaca stole the money from the mineworkers, not Patiño. Appalled, Blackthorn tracks Apodaca into the Andes. Apodaca confirms Mackinley's story. Blackthorn shoots him in the leg, abandoning him with the incriminating money. The Bolivian army kills Apodaca and takes Mackinley's horse as punishment for helping Blackthorn, who has successfully escaped over the mountains.

Blackthorn seeking to return to the US after receiving a letter from his nephew (or possible son), informing him that his mother has died: she's Etta Place, female sidekick to the Butch 'n' Sundance double-act.

But although the similarly blue-eyed Shepard is wholly believable as Newman's character two decades on, the film itself has little of its predecessor's vivacious vim, despite a plethora of well-staged shootouts and chases: the one across the Uyuni salt flats is particularly memorable, not least for the literally dazzling location. Miguel Barros's script, much of which is in Spanish, sets up plenty of contrasts between the early 1900s and the late 1920s, the changing notion of the outlaw, and the elegiac reflection on past glories and missed opportunities, but never infuses them with much dramatic vigour.

Two thirds in, things liven up considerably with the arrival of Stephen Rea as haggard Irish-born former Pinkerton detective Mackinley, swigging wine from the bottle as he processes the unexpected confirmation of his decades-old theory about Butch Cassidy's fate. It's hardly a novel idea that cop and crook should have more in common than otherwise, but Shepard and Rea's scenes together strike the kind of sparks sorely lacking elsewhere. However, the fact that there's little chemistry between Shepard and Eduardo Noriega, as the Spanish-born thief Eduardo Apodaca, may well be intentional. Blackthorn's decision to take on a new sidekick seems motivated as much by a deep-seated desire to rekindle his past as anything else, the impossibility of which is ultimately the film's core theme, and indeed its abiding irony. **Michael Brooke**

CREDITS

Produced by
Andrés Santiana
Ibon Cormenzana
Written by
Miguel Barros
Director of Photography
Juan Ruiz-Anchía
Editor
David Gallart
Art Director
Juan Pedro de Gaspar
Music
Lucio Godoy
Sound Design and Editing
Fabiola Ordoño
Costume Designer
Clara Bilbao
Action Co-ordinator
Jordi Casares

©Eter Pictures AIE, Nix Films AIE, Arcadia Motion Pictures SL, Manto Films AIE
Production Companies
Ariane Marañón Films and Arcadia Motion Pictures present in association with Quickfire Films a Nix Films AIE, Eter Pictures AIE, Manto Films AIE, Pegaso Producciones, Noodles Production production
With the participation of TVE, Canal+, Ono, ICAA, Programa Ibermedia
With financing from ICO - Instituto de Crédito

Official
With the participation of Audiovisual SGR
Executive Producers
Paolo Agazzi
Ignasi Estapé
Ángel Duráñez
Jerôme Vidal
James Atherton
Jan Pace
Marina Fuentes

CAST

Sam Shepard
James Blackthorn
Eduardo Noriega
Eduardo Apodaca
Stephen Rea
Mackinley
Magaly Solier
Yana
Nikolaj Coster-Waldau
young James
Padraic Delaney
Sundance
Dominique McElligott
Etta

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

9,192 ft +0 frames

Spanish theatrical title
Blackthorn Sin destino

Breathing

Austria 2011

Director: Karl Markovics

Certificate 15 93m 43s

A stark, self-effacing portrait of a young man at the fringes of society, actor Karl Markovics's directorial debut will undoubtedly invite comparisons with Samantha Morton's *The Unloved* and Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (both 2009), as well as with their antecedent, Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999). But it is with the films of the Dardenne brothers, most notably *The Son* (2002), that *Breathing* has most in common. Reversing the premise of that film – in which Olivier Gourmet's carpenter took on his son's young murderer as an apprentice – *Breathing* centres on 19-year-old Roman's search for a job after spending four years in a juvenile detention centre for killing a boy in a brawl ("I didn't murder him, he died in hospital," he asserts).

The film opens in a metalwork factory, where the constantly clanging machinery overwhelms any clear view of the individuals who work there: only when we move into the car park outside do we zoom in on our protagonist, a blank-faced man-boy who, filmed from a distance, is marked out as an adolescent only by his bow-legged, puff-chested teenage swagger.

At the detention centre, Roman lives an almost catatonic existence: smoking, reading, catching daily buses to his work-release placements, resignedly submitting to the indignity of daily strip searches. His habit (one could hardly call it a passion) of swimming provides the film's central metaphor – raised from birth in institutions, Roman has been living an underwater existence but is perhaps, finally, surfacing for air – as well as a starkly moving illustration of his isolation. As we float beneath the pool's surface with Roman, a series of bleached-out pairs of calves line up along the side, a metonymic reference to the boys who won't enter the water until he has left. Since Roman knows little of life outside care homes and prison, it's small wonder that his attempts to find a day-release job are self-sabotaging. Nor is it particularly surprising that it is at the city morgue, a state institution populated with bodies whose physical lifelessness echoes his emotional numbness, that he finally finds a job he can stick with. Here he begins to move beyond the liminal space he has so long inhabited, looking forwards to a life after prison, but also backwards, as he seeks out the mother who abandoned him at birth and comes to terms with his youthful crime.

Markovics has absorbed the Dardennes' intensely naturalistic style, along with their obsessive eye for the details of menial labour. A finely calibrated sequence at the film's mid-point sees Roman and his colleagues servicing the body of an elderly lady, dead on her kitchen floor. The efficiency with which they haul her to the bed, strip and sponge her down before neatly reclothing her and tidying away could so easily have seemed callous, but it is



Parole model: Thomas Schubert

tempered by such an infinitesimal measure of tenderness that it emerges as a rather beautiful piece of filmmaking. Its delicacy is matched by a later scene in which Roman's mother admits her reasons for giving him away: filmed at a distance, side by side against the plaque-coloured tiles of a railway station, the pair make no recriminations, beg no forgiveness. In keeping with the film's neorealist bent, even catharsis is muted.

Since Roman is in every scene and almost every shot, much is asked of

non-professional actor Thomas Schubert and – despite some typically elegant camerawork from Martin Gschlacht, the go-to cinematographer for classy Austrian filmmaking – it is ultimately his performance that raises the film to the level of the sublime. As the camera pulls back and tilts up in the film's final shot, rising over the cemeteries and suburbs to take in the Vienna skyline, the future looks bright for Roman and Markovics alike.

Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Producers
Dieter Pochlatko
Nikolaus Wisiak
Screenplay
Karl Markovics
Director of Photography
Martin Gschlacht
Editor
Alarich Lenz
Production Designer
Isodor Wimmer
Music
Herbert Tucmandl
Original Sound
William Edouard Franck
Costume Designer
Caterina Czepek

©epo-film
Production Companies
epo-film presents a film by Karl Markovics
An epo-film Produktionsges.m.b.H./Wien-Graz production in collaboration with ORF Film/Fernse-Abkommen
Funded by Österreichisches Filminstitut, Filmstandort Austria, Filmfonds Wien, Land Niederösterreich Kultur, Cinesytia Filmkunst

CAST

Thomas Schubert
Roman Kogler
Karin Lischka
Margit Kogler
Georg Friedrich
Rudolf Kienast
Gerhard Liebmann
Walter Fakler
Elena Dörfler
Robert Fakler
Magdalena Kronschräger
young woman
Stefan Matousch
Gerhard Schorn
Luna Mijovici
Mona

Reinhold G. Moritz
Josef Kallinger

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Verve Pictures Ltd

8,434 ft +8 frames

Austrian theatrical title
Atmen

SYNOPSIS Vienna, the present. Nineteen-year-old Roman has lived all his life in institutions and is currently serving time for the accidental killing of another boy when he was 14. Roman's parole hearing is coming up and his parole officer Walter encourages him to secure a job through the centre's day-release programme. Roman's track record with the programme has been poor, but he seems to take to a job shifting dead bodies for the city's municipal morgue, despite the emotional and physical challenges of the work and some rather hostile colleagues.

When Roman is confronted with the corpse of a woman bearing his surname, he begins to make enquiries into the mother who gave him up as an infant. Eventually he tracks her down and confronts her. She seems wholly uninterested in him and the life he has fabricated for himself (claiming, for example, that he is an international scuba instructor), telling him that giving him up was the best decision she ever made.

Weeks pass. At work, Roman's relationship with his colleagues improves. He makes enquiries into the burial place of Martin Stuppek – the boy he killed. One day Roman finds his mother waiting for him outside work. She explains that she gave him up after she attempted to suffocate him with a pillow.

The day of Roman's parole hearing arrives, and he is released. Roman visits Martin's grave before driving away with his colleagues.

Buck

USA 2011

Director: Cindy Meehl

Buck Brannaman, one of America's most respected horse trainers, is the subject of this documentary from his friend and devotee, former fashion designer Cindy Meehl; it comes a belated 15 years after Buck was hired as adviser and body-double on the hugely successful Robert Redford vehicle *The Horse Whisperer*. It's fortunate that Meehl turned filmmaker for the sake of the project, because Brannaman is a quietly compelling and likeable subject, a remarkable example of resilience, reinvention and old-fashioned goodness.

Buck spends nine months of every year running clinics for horse-owners across America, and Meehl's film strings along to Iowa, Montana, Michigan and Alabama, following Buck as, mic'd up in the round pen, he gives lessons in how to handle a horse – with the horse in mind. "Everything you do with a horse is a dance," says Buck, as he demonstrates the rewards of a training method based on sensitivity and mutual understanding, not the quick fix of a 'broken' horse. He proves that pressure on the lead rope is largely unnecessary; that 'feel' can be ten per cent physical, 90 per cent mental. Of course, 'feel' seems like conjuring when Buck does it, willing a stranger's horse into a trailer from ten feet away. It's the first principle of Buck's method that bad behaviour in horses is only fear and millennia of instinct; as he saddles a horse in the ring, he jokes: "Amazingly, they'll let you do it!"

Amazing too that Brannaman is as focused and equable as he is, given his past life. Interviewees and video footage bear witness to Buck's upbringing at the hands of a controlling, abusive father, and his enforced early career from the age of six as one half of a trick-roping double act with his brother Smokie. The film might have done better, however, to trust its subject to speak for himself – there are moments, often passed over by Meehl, that seem to articulate Buck's emotional substance, his quietude, more effectively than any of the interviews: his willingness, after a day's teaching, to trick-rope for the group's entertainment; the responsiveness of his own horse as he rides in tight circles or laterally, never careening into the distance.

The film itself is loosely formatted and literal. There's no extrapolating the truth, no sense of building to a gravitational moment of objective clarity. This is partly because Buck is the most agreeable of subjects, and partly



Ropin' university: Buck Brannaman

because Meehl isn't the kind of documentarist to permit herself to be surprised, reservedly focusing on the transformative experience of attending one of Buck's clinics and his lesser-known personal history. Still, one wonders if Meehl has managed to get the best out of Buck and the (reportedly) 300 hours of footage she shot. (Or is there a broader significance to Buck's vacuuming the front step of his trailer?) The editing is occasionally graceless and the photography frankly plain, but the film's transparent straightforwardness in both style and approach feels exactly right: it looks as if it would if Buck had made it himself.

It may be an unsophisticated, ephemeral one-off, but *Buck* has a saving likeability that makes it difficult to criticise. It won the documentary audience award at last year's Sundance – not, I think, for its connection to the festival's founder, but rather because it stands on its own two (and four) feet, an enlightening and affecting first work.

◆ Thirza Wakefield

CREDITS

Producer
Julie Goldman
Cinematographers
Guy Mossman
Luke Geissbühler
Editor
Toby Shimin
Original Music
David Robbins
Audio Mixer
Andrew Day

©Cedar Creek Productions, LLC, Motto Pictures, Back Allie Productions
Production Companies
Cedar Creek Productions presents in association with Motto Pictures and Back Allie Productions a film by Cindy Meehl
Produced by Cedar Creek Productions, LLC

Produced in association with Motto Pictures and Back Allie Productions
Executive Producer
Cindy Meehl

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

Cabin in the Woods

USA 2011

Director: Drew Goddard

Certificate 15 94m 49s

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a major plot twist

When Boris Karloff hesitated during the filming of the sequence in *Frankenstein* (1931) where the Monster accidentally drowns the little girl, director James Whale persuaded him to go on by arguing that the sacrifice of an innocent was 'part of the ritual'. Director Drew Goddard and producer Joss Whedon, who co-scripted *The Cabin in the Woods*, have spun this stray thought into an entire movie, taking the self-awareness of the *Scream* franchise even further into postmodernism by positing a world preserved from primal chaos only by a series of ritual sacrifices that take the form of horror movies. These sacrifices are masterminded by a clandestine global organisation, whose latest project involves a group of five young friends spending a weekend in an isolated cabin.

An amusing running joke keeps the film abreast of the Japanese arm of the organisation, which is having a gaggle of Kyoto schoolgirls terrorised by a floating ghost who is ultimately exorcised by being confined to the body of a happy frog, while monitors show the aftermaths of similar projects around the world as evil lairs burn down or giant apes lie dead in ruins. This is the most monster-happy movie since Anthony Hickox's *Waxwork* (1988) and *Waxwork II: Lost in Time* (1992), and similarly finds a climactic excuse to unleash a horde of every imaginable menace on the labcoats who have supervised the project: a bat-vampire, killer robots, a knock-off of the Cenobites from *Hellraiser*, a giant snake, a werewolf, zombies, a killer tree, a giant spider, a disturbing ballerina with a tooth-ringed maw for a face, and a Lovecraftian/*Creature from the Black*

Lagoon-ish merman. Also amusing is the moment when each of the kids in the cabin finds an object in the basement that might summon a specific monster, tipping this into a different subgenre of body-count horror picture, before a Latin passage in the diary turns it into a zombie/torture-porn hybrid.

The twist the film brings to its deliberately generic scenario – the title evokes *The Evil Dead* (1981) but also a whole host of lesser horror films – is the peek behind the curtain into the everyday control room of a malign universe which allows, indeed requires, that the young not only be sacrificed but exploited and stereotyped along the way. The most disturbing undercurrent to the banter is the way the kids sometimes sense that they're being made to act out of character (fulfilling archetypal functions as 'the Whore', 'the Fool', etc) – thus sociology major Curt (Chris Hemsworth) becomes a dumb jock, and his girlfriend is prompted to be more sexually aggressive by a secret ingredient in blonde hair dye. By pulling back regularly, so that we see the technicians prematurely celebrating while the 'final girl' is still being battered by the zombie patriarch, or the crowds of looky-loos turning up for the supporting girl's gratuitous nude scene, *Cabin in the Woods* has a lot of fun with the conventions of straight-ahead schlock.

If this wholly engaging and ingenious film has a problem, it's the not unfamiliar postmodern glitch of being too clever by half. Goddard and a solidly likeable cast could probably make a horror picture that delivers fun and shocks as Sam Raimi did in the *Evil Dead* movies, but the tricky approach requires the film to keep cutting away from suspense-building scenes in the woods to the commentary back in the control room, while the script springs surprise reversals that work like jokes rather than scares. For a film about a world on the edge of an abyss, this is a little too flip – evoking H.P. Lovecraft and Clive Barker but not really trying for their sense of cosmic dread and awe.

◆ Kim Newman



Watcher in the woods: Fran Kranz, Chris Hemsworth, Anna Hutchison

SYNOPSIS A documentary about celebrated US horse trainer Buck Brannaman. The film follows Brannaman as he travels the southern States holding training courses in 'natural horsemanship', an approach that involves appealing to horses' instincts. Interviews with friends and family, photographs and television footage piece together Brannaman's early life – his professional trick-roping from a young age in a touring double act with his brother Smokie; his father's brutality; and his removal to a foster family at the age of 12. The documentary covers Brannaman's involvement with the 1998 film *The Horse Whisperer*, as well as his relationship with his wife Mary and youngest daughter Reata.

CREDITS

Produced by
Joss Whedon
Written by
Joss Whedon
Drew Goddard
Director of Photography
Peter Deming
Editor
Lisa Lassek
Production Designer
Martin Whist
Music
David Julian
Production Sound Mixer
David Husby
Costume Designer
Shawna Trpocic
Visual Effects and Animation
Rhythm & Hues Studios

©Lions Gate Films Inc.
Production Companies
Lionsgate presents a
Mutant Enemy
production
A Drew Goddard film
Executive Producer
Jason Clark

CAST

Kristen Connolly
Dana
Chris Hemsworth
Curt
Anna Hutchison
Jules
Fran Kranz
Marty
Jesse Williams
Holden

Richard Jenkins
Sitterson
Bradley Whitford
Hadley
Brian White
Truman
Amy Acker
Lin
Tim deZam
Mordecai
Tom Lenk
Ronald the intern
Dan Payne
Matthew Buckner
Sigourney Weaver
the director

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/ SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

8,533 ft +8 frames

A Cat in Paris

France/Belgium 2010

Directors: Alain Gagnol, Jean-Loup Felicioli

There is something genuinely eye-catching about animators Jean-Loup Felicioni and Alain Gagnol's first feature *A Cat in Paris*. Its feline protagonist Dino is leading two of his nine lives, purring contentedly during the day as companion to young Zoé and her mother Jeanne, then joining cat burglar Nico in his nocturnal prowling. But Zoé has stopped speaking ever since her father was murdered by Victor Costa, a mobster whom Jeanne, a police superintendent, is very close to finally catching. When Zoé runs away from her terrifying nanny and follows Dino into the night, it heralds an adventure that will take her over the rooftops of Paris to the gothic spires of Notre-Dame, where she can finally lay a ghost to rest.

Entirely hand-drawn, *A Cat in Paris*'s flickering images give the film a distinctively retro, old-school feel – shared with other French animations such as *The Triplets of Belleville* (2002), *Persepolis* (2007) and the Tati-scripted *The Illusionist* (2010) – which makes Nico and Dino's gliding movements quiver with life. Felicioni and Gagnol's visual references are largely drawn from paintings: expressionist sets; a de Chirico flatness and use of shadow; a hint of Henri Rousseau in Dino's rambling in the bushes; and most noticeably the characters themselves, suggestive of Picasso's cubist angularity. With most of its action taking place in an atmospheric night-time Paris, the playful use of light and shadow produces the film's most imaginative scenes, as when Nico (wearing infra-red goggles) and Dino rescue Zoé from the bad guys in pitch darkness.

Unfortunately this visual feast isn't matched by the plot. The by now mandatory film references, ranging from Tarantino to Hitchcock and *King Kong*, don't really bolster the slight story, which is saddled with dialogue that often falls flat – and it certainly doesn't benefit from some poor English dubbing. Although there are a number of imaginary surreal encounters between the mobster and Jeanne to lift proceedings, the grief of Zoé and her mother is depicted by sudden melodramatic bursts which sit awkwardly within the film's otherwise perky mood and slow the pace down considerably. So much so, in fact, that it comes as a relief when the plot veers into straightforward *noirish* action two-thirds of the way through, injecting some adrenaline. That said, the gear is turned up a notch too fast, leaving some loose ends left untied, in particular Nico's own thief status. There's a vaguely Robin Hood quality imputed to his looting, but no real distinction is drawn between what he and Costa do, despite Nico being presented as ethically sound and alluring. In the end, regrettably the lustrous visuals only accentuate the hollowness of the script.

❖❖ Mar Diestro-Dópido



Rooftop prowlers: 'A Cat in Paris'

CREDITS

Production
Jacques-Rémy Girerd
Script
Alain Gagnol
Dialogue
Jacques-Rémy Girerd
Alain Gagnol
Editing
Hervé Guichard
Artistic Directors
Alain Gagnol
Jean-Loup Felicioli
Graphic Design
Jean-Loup Felicioli
Music
Serge Besset
Sound Design and Effects
Loïc Burkhardt
Animation Supervisor
Jean-Loup Felicioli

©Folimage/Lunanime/
Lumière/Digit Anima/
France 3 Cinéma/
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma/
Agora/RTBF
Production Companies
Folimage Features in co-production with
Folimage, Lunanime,
Digit Anima, France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, RTBF -
Télévision Belge in association with Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Canal+, CinéCinéma, France Télévisions and with the support of Région Rhône-Alpes, Département de la

Drôme, Media - Media I2i, Procirep/Angoa, Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds (VAF), Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique et des Télédistributeurs wallons in association with Films Distribution and Sofica Soficinéma 4 with tax shelter partners Lumière Publishing and BTECH
Folimage Features, Lunanime, Digit Anima present an Alain Gagnol and Jean-Loup Felicioli film
Co-producers: France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, RTBF
Associate Producers: France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Lumière, RTBF -
Télévision Belge
A co-production of Folimage Features, Lunanime - Lumière, Digit Anima, France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, RTBF
In association with Films Distribution and Sofica Soficinéma 4, Région Rhône-Alpes, Département de la Drôme, Valence Agglomération Sud Rhône-Alpes
With the assistance of CNC - Centre national du cinéma et de l'image

animée, Commission d'aide au développement, Comité de sélection d'aide à la musique de films de long-métrage
With the support of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund/Fonds Audiovisuel Flamand (VAF), Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique et des Télédistributeurs wallons and the tax shelter partners BTECH, Lumière
Produced with the support of Programme Media I2i de la Communauté Européenne
Script support of the Centre Images - Région Centre
With the support of Procirep and the Angoa-Agicia

Executive Producers
Emmanuel Bernard
Annie Degryse
Arnaud Demuynck

VOICE CAST

English language version
Mark Irons
Nico/Mister Hulot/
Mister Patate
Sara Vertongen
Jeanne
Jerry Killick
Victor Costa

Jasmine Avlonitis-Perrin
Zoé
Carly Wyls
Claudine/old lady/lady on the boat
Thomas Bellinck
Lucas/Mister Bébé
Richard Wells
Mister Frog/nightwatch 1/Nico in car/policeman 1
Johan De Paepe
nightwatch 2/dog's master/zoo guardian
Stef De Paepe
2nd man on the boat

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

French theatrical title
Une Vie de chat

SYNOPSIS Paris, the present. Zoé and her mother Jeanne, a police superintendent, have been living on their own since Zoé's father was murdered by mobster Victor Costa. As a consequence, Zoé does not speak. Zoé's cat Dino leads a double life, spending his days with Zoé and her mother and then joining cat burglar Nico for his nocturnal exploits. At work Jeanne is getting close to capturing Costa, who's planning to steal the valuable statue the Colossus of Nairobi from a museum. It transpires that Zoé's nanny works for Costa; she warns him about Jeanne's latest moves. Left alone at home by her nanny one night, Zoé follows Dino, only to fall into the hands of Costa and his gang. Nico tries to save her but fails. Jeanne is put on the case; she arrests Nico for his burglaries and accuses him of kidnapping Zoé. Before escaping, Nico explains that the nanny works for Costa, and that it is Costa who has kidnapped Zoé. Zoé, meanwhile, abducted by her nanny, recovers her voice and calls for Jeanne, who can't hear her. Jeanne and the police chase after Nico and find him fighting Costa on the gargoyles of Notre-Dame. With Nico's help, Jeanne and her colleagues corner Costa on a crane. He jumps off the crane, imagining that he will be saved by the Colossus of Nairobi come to life, but in fact falls to his death. In a coda, Nico is shown living with Zoé, Jeanne and Dino.

Cleanskin

Director: Hadi Hajaig
Certificate 15 108m 5s

Writer-producer-director-editor Hadi Hajaig sets himself a daunting challenge in *Cleanskin*. On the one hand he's trying to make a hardboiled thriller in the Jack Ryan/Jason Bourne mould; on the other, he's examining just why young British Muslims become radicalised. The action elements and the politics don't sit comfortably together.

Hajaig (whose previous feature was 2005's *Puritan*) is clearly an accomplished filmmaker – *Cleanskin* has high production values, belying its relatively modest budget (reportedly less than £2 million). He makes excellent use of his London locations, which range from West End hotels to squats, council estates and suburban houses, and he doesn't skimp on the explosions. He has an eye, too, for the telling throwaway detail – the logo on a piece of clothing, the smudge a baby leaves on the lapel of a secret agent's jacket. But *Cleanskin* is clumsily structured, leaping three or six years back in time to chronicle the growing radicalism of Ash (engagingly played by Abhin Galeya), and it lacks the biting satirical irony that Chris Morris brought to a similar subject in *Four Lions* (2010).

The idea of making Ash, ostensibly the villain, the most sympathetic and nuanced character in the film is a departure from genre norms, but so much attention is paid to his backstory that every other character is ignored. Sean Bean's Ewan, the secret-service agent on Ash's tail, isn't portrayed in anything like the same detail – there are fleeting references to his time in the army and to a tragedy in his private life, but when he says, "I love my country, I've killed for it and I'll die for it," we're not sure what drives his patriotism. Bean excels at this kind of character – a rugged, dour loner who rarely expresses his feelings and who seems impervious to pain (Ewan is shot to pieces in the opening scenes but is back on duty moments later) – but with so little information provided about

him, he can't help but seem a cipher.

Hajaig throws in a murky, John le Carré-style subplot about political corruption at the heart of the British establishment, but he's so busy cranking up the tension and staging chases and fight scenes that it feels like an afterthought. The tone oscillates wildly: at times we seem to be watching a ripping yarn, full of Hitchcockian touches, about doughty British heroes fighting the enemy within, but the escapism is continually undermined by political sermonising and the film's tendency to take itself very seriously.

Hajaig is far bolder and more accomplished than many other tyro British directors making half-baked gangster pictures and thrillers, but *Cleanskin* is so shot through with contradictions and non sequiturs that it struggles to stay afloat.

♦♦ Geoffrey MacNab

CREDITS

Produced by
Hadi Hajaig
Written by
Hadi Hajaig
Director of Photography
Ian Howes
Editor
Hadi Hajaig
Production Designer
Humphrey Jaeger
Music
Simon Lambros
Production Sound Mixer
Andrew Quinney
Costume Designer
Maja Meschede
Stunt Co-ordinator
Peter Pedrero

©[TBC]
Production Companies
Warner Bros. and The UK Film Studio present in association with the Salt Co.

CAST

Sean Bean
Ewan Keane
Charlotte Rampling
Charlotte McQueen
Abhin Galeya
Ash
Tuppence Middleton
Kate
James Fox
Scott Catesby

Peter Polycarpou
Nabil
Michelle Ryan
Emma, waitress
Silas Carson
Amin
Shivani Ghai
Rena
Chris Geere
Nick
Sam Douglas
Harry
Tariq Jordan
Paul
Tom Burke
Mark
Glenn Wrage
Sergeant Glen Conlan

Dolby Digital Surround Ex
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

9,727 ft +8 frames

Damsels in Distress

USA 2011
Director: Whit Stillman
Certificate 15 99m 3s

One of that wave of 1990s indie auteurs whose oeuvre has been stalled by the vagaries of recent film funding, Whit Stillman has just made his first feature in 13 years. Connoisseurs of his gently satirical comedies of manners in which young preppies earnestly debate morality and negotiate romantic obstacles can rest assured. The good news is that little has changed. But then, the bad news is that little has changed. *Damsels in Distress*, a charming but determinedly fanciful campus comedy in which a bossy quartet of girls try to 'civilise' their boorish male counterparts and find love, registers as a sweetly comic romp, but one stylised (or Stillmanised) to the point of self-parody. The sunny Ivy League landscapes, pastel twinsets and frothy subject-matter combine to create a cutely timeless and technology-free world of dating, dancing and do-gooding.

Taking its cues and its look from movies of a more innocent age, the film chooses to ignore the Facebook and hook-up reality of today's youth. Instead there's a nostalgic, mock-serious, girlish frivolity that makes it feel like 'Clueless Goes to College', as Violet and her acolytes date dim frat boys as a form of social work ("With someone frankly inferior, it's more rewarding") and organise soap donations to smelly male dorms. The slightly jarring note in this world of unfettered whimsy is the film's arch treatment of the girls' Suicide Prevention Centre, where only the certifiably depressed may be treated to Dunkin' Donuts and tap-dancing

classes. Sly laughs are wrung from an inept suicide attempt but, despite the whiff of *Heathers* (1988), there are no blackly comic yucks here.

As usual in Stillman's work, scenes are propelled by verbose streams of opinionated chat, some of them very funny (there's a gloriously straight-faced riff about Cathar beliefs and "non-procreative sex") but others straining for laughs – the running gag about a pushy-parented frat boy who has never learned to recognise colours feels like a discarded *Saturday Night Live* sketch. You're never quite sure if *Damsels in Distress* is misfiring as a comedy, or if Stillman's teasing scripting is simply spoofing the genre. In his previous films, discussion often formed a key plot component – an unwisely fabricated tale and a verbal duel between a principled WASP and a Eurotrash womaniser were two of the pivotal points in *Metropolitan* (1989). Here, both dialogue and plotting are prettily presented but unfocused, and the broadness of the comedy makes the romantic misadventures of Violet and her new recruit Lily appear whisper-thin. A deliberate flatness in the performances doesn't help, since only Greta Gerwig's Violet (smacking her gags home in deliciously deadpan fashion) can make her affectless delivery appealing, and her lovelorn predicament involving rather than faintly irritating. Her wide-eyed intensity comes into its own during the film's charm-bomb of a finale, an endearingly clunky song-and-dance routine to 'Things Are Looking Up' in which Gerwig dances as gamely but gawkily as Joan Fontaine in the film's 1937 near-namesake *A Damsel in Distress*.

Whether Stillman's existing fans will enjoy the film's unabashed levity and larkiness or miss the dry social commentary and yuppie heart-searching that marked out *Barcelona*



Higher learning: Megalyn Echikunwoke, Greta Gerwig

SYNOPSIS London, the present. An arms dealer meets a prostitute in an upmarket hotel. As he leaves the hotel he is shot by a gunman who steals his suitcase, which contains Semtex. His bodyguard Ewan is badly wounded. It transpires that Ewan is a secret-service agent working undercover.

Following the theft of the suitcase, a suicide bomber detonates a huge explosion in a London restaurant. Other bombings follow. Ewan is instructed by his bosses Charlotte McQueen and Scott Catesby to track down the terrorist cell and stop the killings. The leader of the cell is Ash, a former British law student. Flashbacks show how he was radicalised by preacher Nabil and ended his relationship with his girlfriend Kate.

Ewan and his partner Mark discover and assassinate two members of the terrorist cell but Ash escapes them. They're instructed to check into a London hotel. While he's sleeping, Ewan is attacked by Mark. He kills Mark. In the hotel, Ewan apprehends Ash and shoots him before he can detonate a bomb at the wedding of a rightwing American politician. However, another bomb explodes, causing carnage.

In the jacket of a terrorist suspect he had previously killed, Ewan finds a key to a safe box. Files in the safe box reveal that the suspect was, in fact, a double agent: security forces had him killed when he alerted them to the fact that Nabil was planning to bomb London. Ewan realises that his bosses have been working with Nabil, and that the bombings were part of a scheme to destabilise the government. He confronts Charlotte and kills her, making her death look like a suicide and leaving evidence on the park bench beside her to suggest that she took her own life in remorse at her treachery.

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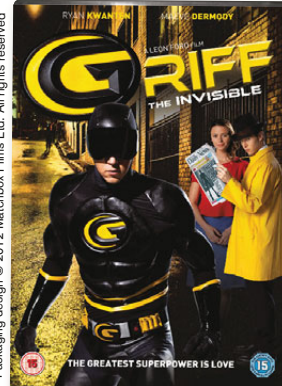
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released 16/04/12

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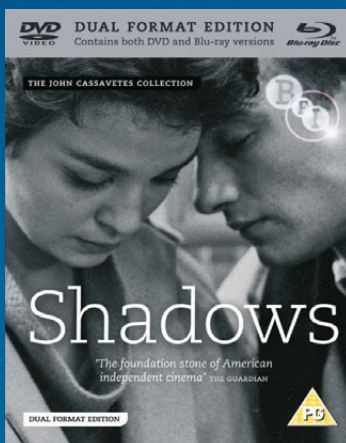
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← (1994) and *The Last Days of Disco* (1998) is anyone's guess. Leaving autobiography behind (the previous trilogy were rooted in Stillman's experience of the debutante circuit, Studio 54 and a stint in Spain) seems to have lessened the director's insight, if not his wit. Newcomers won't notice a certain lack of heart, but those of us who enjoyed Stillman's decade as New York's answer to Eric Rohmer might mourn its absence. **◆◆ Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by

Whit Stillman
Martin Shafer
Liz Glotzer

Written by

Whit Stillman

Cinematography

Doug Emmett

Edited by

Andrew Hafitz

Production Design

Elizabeth J. Jones

Music

Mark Suozzo

Adam Schlensinger

Sound

Mikhail Sterkin

Costumes

Ciera Wells

Special Fashions

Krista Blomberg

Choreography

Justin Cerne

©Damsels Productions

LLC

Production Companies

Westerly Films presents a

Steeplechase -

Analytic production

Filmed with the support

of the New York State

Governor's Office for

Motion Picture and

Television Development

CAST

the damsels

Greta Gerwig

Violet Wister

Analeigh Tipton

Lily

SYNOPSIS US, present day. Violet, Rose and Heather, three do-gooding preppy girls at a small Ivy League college, enlist transfer student Lily into their mission to save depressives and reform the college's philistine, unwashed males. Leader Violet uses their Suicide Prevention Centre, which teaches tap-dancing as therapy, to help jilted student Priss. Priss is caught kissing Violet's boyfriend Frank. A saddened Violet disappears from college. Lily briefly dates sophisticated French student Xavier, and is wooed by Charlie, a businessman. Violet returns with an epiphany about the life-changing properties of scented soap. Charlie is unmasked as Fred, an eighth-year education student, and he and Lily start to date happily. Violet's transformation of the male dorms with soap donations is a success. She attempts to launch her new Latin dance, the Sambola, as a worldwide craze, and learns to be less controlling. Finally, Violet and Fred perform a closing song-and-dance number with a chorus of friends and suicide-centre clients.

Delicacy

France/Belgium 2011

Director: David Foenkinos,
Stéphane Foenkinos

Certificate 12A 109m 2s

You'd be hard-pressed to find a French person who isn't familiar with the premise of David Foenkinos's 2009 novel *Delicacy*, a kind of Gallic hybrid of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* and David Nicholls's *One Day* that's sold more than 700,000 copies and won ten literary prizes. But despite the fact that it's been translated into more than 21 languages, the book is as yet relatively unknown abroad – which puts newcomers in the enviable position of not quite knowing what to expect from a film adaptation that spends almost half its running time wrong-footing us, to delightful effect.

Directed by the author and his brother Stéphane, the film bills itself as a romance, and gives us just enough time to invest emotionally in the young, impossibly beautiful and implausibly happy pairing of Nathalie (Audrey Tautou) and François (Pio Marmaï) before summarily dispensing with the latter, leaving us – and Nathalie – trying to find our feet in disorienting, melancholy terrain. At this point we might expect the young widow to seek solace in the arms of her handsome mentor Charles (a leonine Bruno Todeschini), who hitherto has appeared a model of chivalrous solicitude, though a dinner date reveals him to be the most stereotypical of Gallic *séducteurs* – and a married one at that. Meanwhile the character who will eventually stir Nathalie's petrified heart – a man so insipid that his co-workers don't recognise his name – slips into the film as a barely glimpsed balding pate in a meeting. So we don't even know we've already seen him when, somewhere around the film's mid-point, Nathalie stalks across her office and passionately embraces the boggle-eyed, gap-toothed, red-faced Swede Markus (François Damiens).

Delicacy was more or less written for Tautou, who plays with type as a fragile yet twinkly gamine: among various quirky inclusions in Foenkinos's novel (such as recipes and lists of football scores) there is a chapter in the form of a screenplay that casts the actress as Nathalie. The casting of Belgian actor Damiens as the cumbersome Markus was undoubtedly a trickier task. No *joli-laid* Duris is Damiens, nor virile Depardieu: make no bones about it, he is incontrovertibly unattractive, with the air of a more awkward Paul Giamatti. Faced with his massive torso and tiny legs, blinking stare and lurching walk, it is easy to see why Nathalie's friends recoil in shock at the thought of their ethereal darling in Markus's sweaty arms.

It's a brave move, which could quite possibly have alienated audiences. But some clever use of point-of-view cinematography makes it easy to empathise with Markus's amazement and terror at this strange development. On the walk home after Nathalie first kisses him, decrepit old ladies become



The age of innocents: Audrey Tautou

sexy sirens gazing provocatively at him as he passes; so bewildered is he that he forgets the code to his door. When he looks at Nathalie, streets light up and flashbulbs pop. *Delicacy* features numerous instances of the twee whimsy that has become something of a post-*Amélie* trademark for French romcoms: a dolly shot of Nathalie and François whirling in white outside a snow-capped hôtel de ville; a voiceover informing us that "with François, time flashes by – he is the kind of man who can make weeks without Thursdays"; the central role of a Pez dispenser as a romantic token. Such self-conscious cuteness will either charm or irritate depending on one's taste, but those subtle, fleeting

moments in which we share in Markus's marvelling feel genuinely fresh, and really quite moving.

There are more substantial laughs to be found in this beauty-and-the-beast pairing, many of which come at the expense of the Swedes. Ikea furniture and Krisprolls are recurring jokes: offered one of the latter, Markus deadpans that he left his homeland to avoid them. It's ironic, of course, since it's this Swedish sensibility – wry, unexpected and ever so welcome – which tempers the more sickly-sweet elements of the Foenkinos brothers' film, lending it the very delicacy that might otherwise have proved elusive.

◆◆ Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Producers

Xavier Rigault

Marc-Antoine Robert

Written by

David Foenkinos

Based on his novel *La*

Délicatesse

Director of Photography

Rémy Chevrin

Editing

Virginie Bruant

Set Designer

Maamar Ech-Cheikh

Sound

Daniel Sobrino

Nicolas Moreau

Costumes

Emmanuelle

Youchnovski

©2.4.7. Films.

StudioCanal, France 2

Cinéma

Production Companies

A.2.4.7. Films.

StudioCanal, France 2

Cinéma co-production

With the participation of

Canal+, Ciné+, France

Télévisions

In association with La

Banque Postale Image

4, Palatine Etoile 8,

Panache Productions,

La Compagnie

Cinématographique

Européenne

With the support of Tax

Shelter du

Gouvernement Fédéral

de Belgique

Investors: Ice-Watch, La

Librairie Filigranes

With the support of

Programme MEDIA de

l'Union Européenne

CAST

Audrey Tautou

Nathalie

François Damiens

Markus

Bruno Todeschini

Charles

Mélanie Bernier

Chloé

Joséphine de Meaux

Sophie

Pio Marmaï

François

Monique Chaumette

Madeleine

Marc Citti

Pierre

Alexandre Pavloff

Benoît

Vittoria Scognamiglio

François' mother

Olivier Cruveiller

François' father

Audrey Fleuret

Ingrid, Charles' secretary

In Colour [1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

StudioCanal Limited

9,813 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title

La Délicatesse

SYNOPSIS Paris, the present. Nathalie and François are young, successful, beautiful and in love. They marry, and on graduating Nathalie secures a job in a Swedish corporation under the management of handsome Charles. Their idyll is shattered, however, when François is run over and killed. Devastated, Nathalie throws herself into her work.

Three years later Nathalie is promoted. At a celebratory dinner, Charles propositions her; Nathalie rejects his advances. The next day at work she passionately kisses her nondescript employee Markus, much to his shock and delight. She agrees to have dinner with him. After a successful evening, the pair arrange another date, which goes well. Aware that Nathalie is out of his league, Markus calls a halt to their fledgling relationship. Nathalie realises that she may be developing feelings for him. They rekindle their friendship. When Nathalie introduces Markus to her friends, they imply that she could do better.

After a jealous Charles arranges a transfer to Sweden for Markus, Nathalie walks out of work and travels to her and François's childhood home. Markus meets her there and they visit François's grave before paying a call on Nathalie's grandmother, in whose house they make love.

The Divide

USA/Germany/
Canada/France 2011
Director: Xavier Gens

For filmmakers pondering the apocalypse – whether man-made or courtesy of external agencies – it now seems almost mandatory to underscore that hell is, most definitely, other people. *The Divide* reminds us of this truism with shrieking bold type and a slew of agonised exclamation marks. It signals a return to provocative, button-pushing fare for French director Xavier Gens, who followed up his 2007 neo-Nazi ordeal-horror debut *Frontier(s)* with the flashy, vacuous videogame adaptation *Hitman*. But although there's some strenuous gawping into the abyss on offer, *The Divide* is, at core, a similarly empty exercise. At first grabbing the attention with its hell-for-leather urgency, it devolves into a rancid sludge, a monotonous portrait of dehumanisation that all the while teeters on the edge of absurd comedy.

Opening with a *Blade Runner*-pilfered shot of explosions reflected in the eye of nominal heroine Eva (Lauren German), Gens establishes an antagonistic mood as panicked Manhattan tower-block residents flee the nukes going off outside. A few of them make it inside the basement that's home to caretaker Mickey (Michael Biehn), a gnarled rightwing survivalist who immediately blames the attack on "crazy ragheads". Mickey's dingy bunker certainly fits the

bill as a Sartrean soul prison; less can be said about the crudely drawn characters inhabiting it. Biehn's eye-rolling performance is a handy barometer of the film's constantly hysterical pitch; even considering the extreme circumstances, the survivors are incredibly – arguably, artificially – hostile from the outset. Given this one-note stridency, there's scant room for tension to build organically.

After an unnerving interlude in which mysterious biohazard-suited interlopers raid the bunker, the survivors find themselves welded in for good. Here, *The Divide* spectacularly loses the plot, becoming a rudderless, deadening catalogue of atrocity. Hope dwindles, radiation poisoning sets in, and torture, rape and lunacy become second nature. Rosanna Arquette's mentally fragile character gets the shortest straw, her trajectory from bereft single mum to abject sex slave being both unbelievable and rankly misogynistic. As her tormentor, Michael Eklund is the pick of the ensemble – an unshackled, genuinely skin-crawling turn.

For Gens, there's little sense of progression – indeed, he seems in thrall to other contemporary stylists. The sepulchral widescreen camerawork apes David Fincher, while fidgety editing tics like looped shots of cans of baked beans being opened are lifted from early Aronofsky. As in *Frontier(s)*, attempts at political commentary are crass. With little to say beyond the obvious, the film's nihilism is strictly sophomoric.

♦♦ Matthew Taylor

CREDITS

Produced by
Ross M. Dinerstein
Darryn Welch
Juliette Hagopian
Nathaniel Rollo
Written by
Karl Mueller
Eron Sheean
Director of Photography
Laurent Barès
Edited by
Carlo Rizzo
Production Designer
Tony Noble
Music
Jean-Pierre Taieb
Sound Engineer
Brock Capell
Costume Designer
Mary Hyde Kerr

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Production Companies
Anchor Bay Films
presents a Preferred Content, Instinctive Film, Juliette Inc. production in association with BR Group and The Ink Connection
Produced with financial investment from Manitoba Film & Music
Produced in participation of the Government of Manitoba – Manitoba Film and Video
Production Tax Credit
A film by Xavier Gens
Executive Producers
Tony Rollo
Cathy Rollo

Chris Ouwinga
Bobby Schwartz
Michael Horn
Jamie Carmichael
Kevin Iwashina
Manoj Jian
Ross Bryan

CAST

Lauren German
Eva
Michael Biehn
Mickey
Milo Ventimiglia
Josh
Courtney B. Vance
Delvin
Iván González
Sam
Michael Eklund
Bobby
Abbey Thickson
Wendi

Ashton Holmes
Adrien
Rosanna Arquette
Marilyn
Jennifer Blanc
Liz

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

Elles

France/Poland/Germany 2011
Director: Malgoska Szumowska
Certificate 18 99m 26s

Early in *Elles*, a man serenades the young hooker with whom he's just had sex, accompanying himself on the guitar. (The song is Joseph Kosma's sweetly melancholic *Les Feuilles mortes* (*Dead Leaves*), with words by Jacques Prévert, originally written for the last Carné-Prévert collaboration, 1946's *Les Portes de la nuit*.) This implausible episode raises fears that we may be in for the French counterpart to Garry Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990). In the event, things do get grittier: before the end of the film we've seen the same girl being violently buggered (by a different client) with a wine bottle. Even so, Malgoska Szumowska's fourth feature, her first in French, throws scarcely more light on real-life prostitution than Marshall's glossy fantasy.

Rationale for these and several other sex scenes is that they're flashbacks being related to journalist Anne (Juliette Binoche) by two young students. Both are part-time *horizontales*, and Anne is writing an article about the phenomenon of student prostitution for *Elle* magazine (hence the film's title). She's taken aback to find that neither has any moral qualms about what she does: "It doesn't take much time and you get used to the money," explains Charlotte (Anaïs Demoustier), the French student who calls herself Lola for professional purposes. "Doesn't it make you feel lonely?" asks Anne, but apparently not. Charlotte's only reservation is "having to lie all the time" – mainly to her boyfriend Thomas.

Anne's other interviewee, Polish student Alicja (Joanna Kulig), is equally insouciant, batting aside Anne's simplistic motivational suggestions of childhood neglect, incest, over-exposure to porn and the like. Golden showers don't worry her, and she mockingly repeats some of the questions her clients come out with: "Do you like my

huge prick? Like this, little bitch? Is this making you wet?" Startled by the last question, Anne responds "Moi?" – only to realise she's given herself away. It's an amusing moment, but highlights the film's chief weakness: for a woman of her background, Anne is altogether too naive, too open-mouthed with astonishment at the responses she's getting, to be credible.

Similarly, her gradual realisation that her own life is no less oppressed and exploited feels equally unconvincing. Binoche, as ever, does a sterling job as the put-upon wife, struggling with her shopping trolley and cursing a recalcitrant fridge door, but you can't help wondering where this seemingly intelligent Parisienne has been for the last 40 years. The film starts, and almost ends, with a scene of fellatio. In a pre-credit sequence we see Charlotte going down on a client, apparently much to his satisfaction; in the penultimate scene Anne tries the same procedure on her husband with rather less success. The implication, here and elsewhere, is that society makes all women prostitutes, but that some are better at the game than others. It all feels like something out of a radical feminist tract from the 1970s; the argument's moved on a good deal since then.

♦♦ Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Produced by
Marianne Slot
Written by
Tine Byrckel
Malgoska Szumowska
Director of Photography
Michal Englert
Editors
Françoise Tourmen
Jack Drosio
Art Director
Pauline Bourdon
Original Music
Pawel Mykietyń
Sound
André Rigaut
Costume Designer
Katarzyna Lewinska

Szumowski, ZDF
Production Companies
Slot Machine presents a Slot Machine production
In co-production with Zentropa International Poland, Zentropa International Köln, Canal+ Poland, ZDF, Shot Szumowski, Liberator Productions
With the support of Polish Film Institute, Filmstiftung NRW, Deutscher Filmförderfonds, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Procirep, Angoa-Agicoo
With the participation of Haut et Court Distribution, Memento Films International, Potemkine et Agnès B.

©Slot Machine, Zentropa International Poland, Zentropa International Köln, Canal+ Poland, Shot



The secret in their eyes: Juliette Binoche, Anaïs Demoustier

SYNOPSIS Manhattan, the present. When the city suffers a nuclear attack, residents of an apartment block take shelter in the basement, which is home to caretaker Mickey. Tensions flare among the group: brothers Josh and Adrien and their friend Bobby are furious that Mickey forbids them to leave the basement; Delvin suspects Mickey of hiding food. Mysterious invaders wearing biohazard suits raid the basement. One flees after snatching Wendi, the daughter of single mother Marilyn; the others are killed by the residents. Josh ventures outside to discover Wendi, apparently dead, being experimented on in a laboratory. After pursuing Josh back to the basement, suited men weld the door shut, trapping the residents inside. Mickey claims self-defence when he kills Delvin, who had located Mickey's hidden provisions. Eva, doubting her weak fiancé Sam, becomes drawn to Adrien. Josh and Bobby hold Mickey captive, and assume control of the group. Marilyn degrades herself with Bobby and Josh. Mickey confides to Eva that there is a secret exit to the surface through the latrines. Josh and Bobby, both now dying of radiation poisoning, murder Marilyn. Eva distracts Josh while Sam locates Mickey's stashed gun; the plan backfires and Eva is raped. Sam returns but shoots Adrien. Eva kills Bobby, while Josh self-immolates. As the fire spreads, Eva uses a biohazard suit to escape through the sewer, leaving Sam and Mickey behind. At the surface, Eva finds the city levelled.

DVD, Kino Swiat
In association with
Cofinova 7, ARTE/
Cofinova 6, Sofica
Soficinéma 6
Executive Producers
Olivier Guerbois
German:
Johannes Rexin
Film Extracts
Destriated (2006)

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

8,949 ft +0 frames

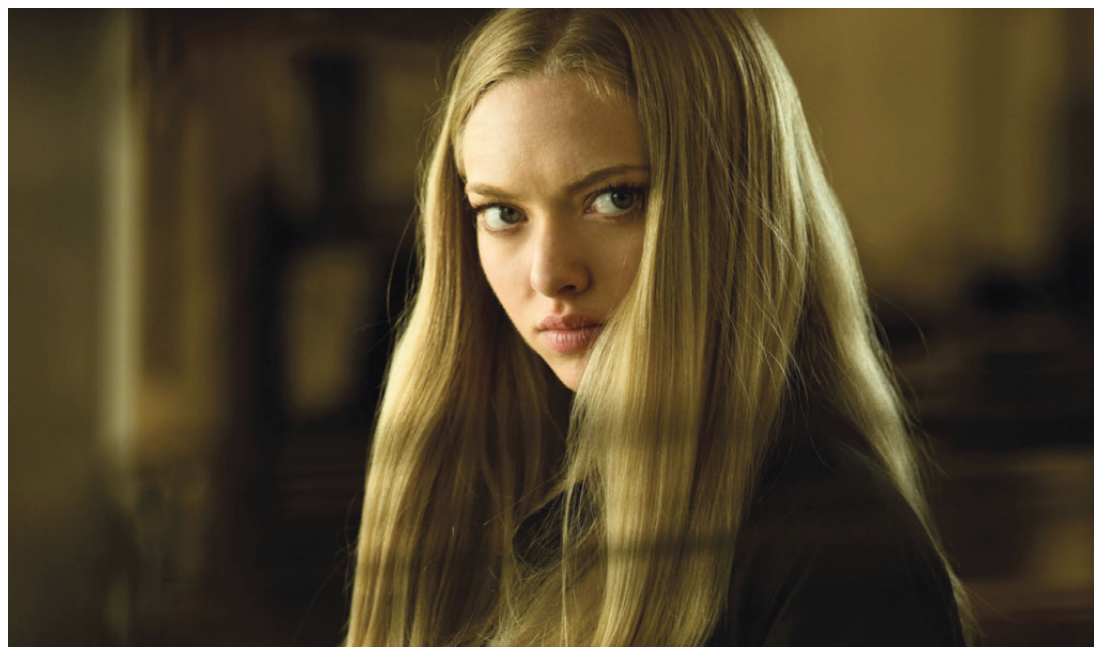
CAST

Juliette Binoche
Anne
Anaïs Demoustier
Charlotte, 'Lola'
Joanna Kulig
Alicja
Krystyna Janda
Alicja's mother
Louis-Do de Lencquesaing
Patrick
Andzej Chyra
sadistic client
Ali Marhyar
Saïd
Jean-Marie Binoche
Anne's father
François Civil
Florent
Pablo Beugnet
Stéphane
Valérie Dréville
Charlotte's mother
Jean-Louis Coulloc'h
Charlotte's father

SYNOPSIS Present-day Paris. Anne, a freelance journalist, is writing an article for *Elle* magazine about prostitution. Her husband Patrick leaves for work, reminding her that his boss and his wife are coming to dinner. Anne gets her two sons, teenage Florent and ten-year-old Stéphane, off to school before going shopping. She recalls the research she did for her article: a series of interviews with two students, Charlotte (who calls herself Lola) and Alicja (who's Polish), both of whom supplement their income by turning tricks for male clients.

Anne is surprised that both girls treat what they do quite matter-of-factly as an easy way to earn money. Charlotte chose it instead of tedious, underpaid student jobs; Alicja had all her money stolen on arrival in Paris and needed to repay North African student Saïd, who offered her a room in his apartment. We see both girls having sex with various clients: one sings classic chansons to Charlotte, another pisses on Alicja. The girls take most things in their stride, though Charlotte is traumatised when a client sodomises her with a wine bottle.

During the course of the interviews Anne becomes increasingly intimate with both girls, and starts seeing links between their lives and hers. On the day of the dinner party, she has a confrontation with Florent, who's playing truant and getting into drugs. When Patrick arrives home he offers her little support. At dinner Anne hallucinates that the girls' clients are sitting around the table singing to her. She abruptly walks out of the apartment, returning later when the guests have left. She attempts fellatio on Patrick, but without success.



Never let me go: Amanda Seyfried

Gone

USA 2012

Director: Heitor Dhalia

Late winter/early spring is the dumping ground of the release calendar, when studios unload properties they have no real expectations for. Considering the sort of dreck they prize highly enough to set aside for the summer months and awards season, this means, by logic of reverse psychology, that the evacuation of unwanted films frequently makes it the most interesting time of the year to visit the multiplex.

Gone, which arrived in US theatres without so much as a toot of advertising fanfare, isn't an overlooked masterpiece by any stretch, marred as it is by flat dialogue and only adequately handled action sequences, but it is a fundamentally sound thriller with a gloomy, overcast sense of atmosphere, Brazilian director Heitor Dhalia making good use of the sodden, fatigued working-class precincts of Portland and taking a refreshing, almost deadpan approach to sensationalist serial-killer material.

Amanda Seyfried plays Jill, the kidnapping survivor turned self-defence expert who spends a sleepless and urgent 24 hours trying to recover her missing sister from the clutches of, presumably, the same lunatic she herself once escaped. This would traditionally call for a frantic, harried countdown treatment, but Seyfried, whose performance sets the tone for the film, does something different: facing the trial for which she's long been preparing herself, Jill adopts a self-contained stoicism and grace-under-pressure resourcefulness, only opting for imploring tears and frantic invective when there's a chance it will get her what she wants. Jill's one-woman manhunt calls for her to dream up false pretexts under which she can pump witnesses and bystanders for

information, and she proves to be a glib and quick liar – a fact that works in turn to sustain our niggling doubts about her trustworthiness and sanity. The performance of glassy, pop-eyed, outgoing insistence is hemmed in by Seyfried's limitations as an actress – she can play determination and she can play fear, but can't quite show glimpses of one inside the other – and the scope of the film's character study is limited largely to showing Jill in reaction to catastrophe, but the tightly packed *Gone* makes such limitations a virtue.

The chain of clues leads Jill inexorably back to the scene of her captivity; what happens there is

anticlimax, but this is immensely more effective – and dramatically feasible – than the corny, blustering 'empowerment' of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Along the way to the showdown, there's a very well-handled, gooseflesh-raising scene that has Jill driving on a dirt road through the old-growth trails of Portland's Forest Park, guided by the flat, affectless voice of her prime suspect as he baits her with the suggestion of a confession. This exquisite build-up to not much at all makes for the film's lesson: the Bogeyman is just a man after all, and not much of one at that.

►► Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Tom Rosenberg
Gary Lucchesi
Producers
Sidney Kimmel
Dan Abrams
Chris Salvaterra
Written by
Allison Burnett
Director of Photography
Michael Grady
Film Editor
John Axelrad
Production Designer
Charisse Cardenas
Music by/Score
Produced by
David Buckley
Sound Mixer

Glenn Micallef
Costume Designer
Lindsay Ann McKay

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Entertainment Group
LLC

Production Companies
Summit Entertainment,
Lakeshore
Entertainment, Sidney
Kimmel Entertainment
present a Lakeshore
Entertainment/Sidney
Kimmel Entertainment
production
Executive Producers
Andre Lamal
Eric Reid
Ted Gidlow

Bruce Toll
Jim Tauber
Matt Berenson

CAST

Amanda Seyfried
Jill Parrish
Daniel Sunjata
Powers
Jennifer Carpenter
Sharon Ames
Sebastian Stan
Billy
Wes Bentley
Peter Hood
Nick Searcy
Mr Miller
Socratis Otto
Jim
Emily Wickersham
Molly

Joel David Moore
Nick Massey
Katherine Moennig
Erica Lonsdale
Michael Paré
Lt Ray Bozeman

Dolby Digital/Datasat
Digital Sound
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd

SYNOPSIS Portland, Oregon, present day. A year ago Jill survived a kidnapping ordeal. Now, obsessed by the memory of that experience, she spends her days scouring the 5,000-acre Forest Park outside the city, looking for the hole where she was held captive. Her nights are spent at self-defence classes and working shifts at a diner. When Jill comes home one morning to find her sister and housemate Molly missing without explanation, she assumes that her attacker has returned and taken Molly. She reports this to the police, but they have their doubts about Jill's sanity – they don't believe that she was really kidnapped, or that there's anything sinister about Molly's absence. Armed with her gun, Jill takes up the search herself, following a trail of clues that finally leads her into Forest Park at night, to the very hole from which she once escaped.

The police, meanwhile, have begun a search for Jill, who's been reported as armed and unstable. Jill confronts and overpowers her one-time captor in his campsite lair, finally immolating him at the bottom of his prison-pit. Molly kicks her way out of the crawlspace under their house, where the kidnapper had imprisoned her. Jill is vindicated.

Goodbye First Love

France/Germany 2011

Director: Mia Hansen-Løve

Certificate 15 110m 41s

Goodbye First Love is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 52

CREDITS

Producers

Philippe Martin
David Thion

Written by

Mia Hansen-Løve

Director of

Photography

Stéphane Fontaine

Editor

Manon Monnier

Art Direction

Mathieu Menut

Charlotte de Cadville

Sound

Vincent Vatoux

Olivier Goinard

Costume Designer

Bethsabée Dreyfus

©LFP - Les Films

Pelléas, Razor Film,

ARTE France Cinéma,

Rhône-Alpes Cinéma,

Jouror Productions

Production

Companies

Les Films Pelléas and

Razor Film present in

co-production with

ARTE France Cinéma,

WDR/ARTE, Rhône-

Alpes Cinéma, Jouror

Productions with the

participation of Arte

France, Canal+, CinéCinéma, CNC, FFA, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg with the support of Région Ile-de-France, Région Rhône-Alpes in association with Cinéma 5, Cofimage 22 a co-production of ARTE France Cinéma, Arte GEIE, WDR/ARTE, Jouror Productions, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma A film by Mia Hansen Løve
A Les Films Pelléas and Razor Film production

CAST

Lola Créton

Camille

Sebastian

Urzendowsky

Sullivan

Magne-Håvard Brekke

Lorenz

Valérie Bonneton

Camille's mother

Serge Renko

Camille's father

Özay Fecht

Sullivan's mother

Max Ricat

Sullivan's brother

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Artificial Eye Film Company

9,961 ft + 8 frames

French theatrical title

Un Amour de jeunesse

Grave Encounters

USA 2010

Directors: The Vicious Brothers

Certificate 15 89m 31s

Grave Encounters was conceived and co-directed by Colin Minihan and Stuart Ortiz, two 25-year-olds with fun angular haircuts who call themselves the Vicious Brothers. Their website includes an ambitious directors' statement: "Over the last decade, American horror films have become increasingly safe and predictable... it's little wonder the genre isn't taken seriously any more." This isn't necessarily inaccurate, though there's little in *Grave Encounters* to induce hope that the Vicious Brothers will usher in a new golden age. For one thing, their story of a ghost-hunting TV crew locked overnight in an abandoned psychiatric hospital works according to the same hook – 'found-footage' horror – that's been in no small part responsible for the very stagnancy they decry.

The roots of the faux-documentary horror film can be traced through the likes of *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* (1976), *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) and *Snuff* (1976), but it was the box-office success of *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999 that established the template for more than a decade of DV-shot cheapies to come, a formula of subjective, artfully amateurish camerawork which has more recently spread to big-budget sci-fi (*Cloverfield*, *Chronicle*, *Apollo 18*).

Using non-fiction idioms to draw an audience in is nothing new in either horror or science fiction – think of the epistolary technique of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or the news bulletins in Mercury Theatre's *War of the Worlds* – but there's something dispiritingly self-limiting and regressive in this bumper crop of shaky-cam fantastic cinema. Instead of using the aping of trash-media techniques as one element in a filmmaker's toolkit, these movies consistently make it the *entire* toolkit – it's as though *Kane* never advanced beyond its 'News on the March' stunt. In shooting the entirety of *Grave Encounters* as if through a reality TV crew's lens, Minihan and Ortiz both assure and pre-emptively excuse the fact that their film never transcends the aesthetic limitations of, well, a reality TV show, restless zoom and all.

Sean Rogerson, portraying TV show presenter Lance through various stages of mental dissolve, bickers for leadership with Merwin Mondesir's cameraman, unwisely given licence to ad lib from off screen. As huckster psychic Houston, Mackenzie Gray, modelling the leathern look of an Aerosmith cover-band frontman, adds a bit of amusement to the mix. Sartre's claustrophobic lock-in *Huis clos* famously concludes that "Hell is other people." *Grave Encounters*, which abandons its audience to the endless halls of the Collingwood Psychiatric Hospital with an under-directed cast, is by this measure a successful infernal vision – but more than the ghosts that plague them, it's the cast of gibbering Canadian bit-partners one wants to escape.

◆◆ Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Directed by

The Vicious Brothers
[i.e. Colin Minihan,
Stuart Ortiz]

Produced by

Shawn Angelski

Written by

The Vicious Brothers

Director of

Photography

Tony Mirza

Editor

The Vicious Brothers

Production Designer

Paul McCulloch

Sound Mixer

Peter Kepkay

©Digital Interference

Productions Inc. and

Twin Engine Films

Production

Companies

A Digital Interference

production

In association with Twin

Engine Films Ltd.

Darlight Films

Executive Producers

Shawn Angelski

Colin Minihan

Stuart Ortiz

Mark Knechtel

Steve Shells

CAST

Sean Rogerson

Lance Preston

Juan Riedinger

Matt White

Ashleigh Gryzko

Sasha Parker

Merwin Mondesir

T.C. Gibson

Mackenzie Gray

Houston Gray

Ben Wilkinson

Jerry Hartfield

Shawn Macdonald

Morgan Turner

Arthur Corber

Arthur Friedkin

Bob Rathie

Kenny Sandivol

Max Train

punk kid Mike

Marita Eason

punk girl Kelly

Fred Keating

Gary Crawford

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Metrodome Distribution

8,056 ft +8 frames



Bonjour tristesse: Lola Créton

SYNOPSIS Paris, February 1999. Fifteen-year-old Camille Schaeffer is passionately in love with her 19-year-old boyfriend Sullivan. He claims to return her love, but is set on leaving for South America with two male friends in a few months' time, planning to be away for nearly a year. Camille begs him not to go, but to no avail. That summer they spend time together in her parents' holiday home in the Ardèche. In September Sullivan flies to Caracas; at first he writes frequently, but his letters grow steadily rarer, and in February 2000 he writes that he wants to break off contact. Camille attempts suicide.

February 2003. Camille is studying architecture, supporting herself with part-time jobs. Her parents have split up, and she lives with her mother. One evening she invites a young man back, but then refuses to sleep with him. One of her professors, the Norwegian Lorenz, takes the class on a study trip to Germany and Denmark. During the trip he and Camille become close.

July 2007. Camille is now Lorenz's lover, and assistant on his projects; she plans to move in with him. On a bus she sees Sullivan's mother, who tells her he's been back in France for some time. He's living in Marseille, but he contacts her and they meet on his next visit to Paris. Camille, pregnant by Lorenz, has a miscarriage. When Lorenz leaves on a business trip to Aden, she renews her affair with Sullivan. A planned trip to visit him in Marseille is aborted by a rail strike. Sullivan writes saying he wants to break off with her again. Camille and Lorenz visit the Ardèche house with her family; while swimming in the Loire, she inadvertently loses the hat Sullivan gave her.

SYNOPSIS Maryland, US, the present. The producer of paranormal-investigation TV show *Grave Encounters* introduces what is alleged to be an assemblage of found footage from a location shoot that abruptly became the programme's season finale.

With his film crew – TC, Matt and Sasha – the show's host Lance Preston volunteers to be locked overnight in a supposedly haunted abandoned psychiatric hospital, where chief physician Dr Friedkin once carried out lobotomies. Accompanying them is a psychic, Houston. Before padlocking them in, the caretaker warns of bizarre goings-on at night.

Strange things begin to happen: a door slams, an unseen hand brushes Sasha's hair, Matt disappears while collecting equipment. When the caretaker fails to return to release them at the appointed time, the crew break the padlock and discover that the exit has been replaced by a network of hallways. The hour of sunrise brings no light. Walking endless corridors, Lance, TC, Sasha and Houston look in vain for an escape route, periodically seeing phantom patients and disembodied hands grasping from the walls and ceilings. Matt is found wearing a patient's robe and muttering insanities. As the other members of the group are picked off, Lance is left alone wandering the tunnels below the hospital, where he discovers the spectre of the doctor, still operating in an occult lair.

Hara-kiri Death of a Samurai

Japan/United Kingdom 2011
Director: Miike Takashi

Is Miike Takashi an auteur? A mere 50-odd films into his career, it's too soon to say. Like *13 Assassins*, the last Miike film co-produced by Jeremy Thomas, *Hara-kiri: Death of a Samurai* is a remake. The first adaptation of Takiguchi Yasuhiko's largely forgotten novel was Kobayashi Masaki's *Hara-kiri (Seppuku)* in 1962; internationally distributed after winning a Cannes prize in 1963, it was widely taken as a critique of Japanese militarism – and, less plausibly, as a critique of corporate Japan. Miike's version of the novel didn't follow Kobayashi's in winning a Cannes prize last year, partly because the cruelty and gore of the story don't seem as sensationally extreme as they did in 1963, but also because the world is no longer exercised by the threat of Japanese militarism. This version follows countless yakuza movies in highlighting the story's clash between *giri* (duty, the sense of obligation to a code of conduct) and *ninjo* (humanity, the sense of kinship with fellow human beings). In most of Miike's own yakuza movies, the gangsters are far too psychotic to have any feeling for the traditional *giri/ninjo* conflict, but this superbly elegant retelling of Takiguchi's story does right by the theme. In fact its commitment to the *ninjo* half of the equation will likely disappoint those who come to Miike films expecting perversity a go-go.

The plot structures of the two versions are almost identical. The story is set in the early 1600s, two or three decades after the shogun's military coup and sidelining of the emperor. The shogunate has consolidated its power by forcing many clans to disband, in the process creating a large class of ronin (unemployed samurai). Takiguchi's story pits two ronin from the former Fukushima Clan in Hiroshima against the unyielding might of the Ii Clan in Edo. Impoverished ronin Tsukumo Hanshiro (Nakadai Tatsuya in Kobayashi's version, kabuki star Ichikawa Ebizo here) follows a trend of the time by approaching the Ii Clan and requesting permission to die honourably on its premises; he claims he can no longer bear the shame of his position and wishes to commit suicide in the traditional, agonising samurai manner by slicing open his belly. Saito, the senior retainer of the Ii Clan (Mikuni Rentaro last time, Yakusho Koji here), takes this as an oblique plea for charity and tries to talk Tsukumo out of it by recounting the gruesome fate of a recent predecessor: the clan forced him to go through with his suicide, even after discovering that he had only a blunt bamboo replica of his pawned sword. But Tsukumo has an ulterior motive for being there: the last victim of the clan's lack of *ninjo* was his son-in-law Chijiwa Motome

(Ishihama Akira last time, hot current star Eita here), and he wants revenge for the clan's inhumanity. He has already humiliated the three retainers most responsible for Chijiwa's sufferings by severing their symbolic topknots, and he now seeks to die challenging the clan's cruel insistence on the martial code of *bushi-do*.

Shooting in 3D but pushing nothing in the viewer's face, Miike makes much less than Kobayashi of Tsukumo's victories over the cruel samurai who oversaw Chijiwa's death, and much more than Kobayashi of the ronins' impoverished home life. The vision of Edo-period shantytown poverty owes more to Yamanaka Sadao's great *Humanity and Paper Balloons (Ninjo Kamifusen, 1937)* than it does to anything in the Kurosawa/Kobayashi canons. In essence, Miike is returning to the historical naturalism pioneered by Yamanaka and rejecting the stylised movements, physical posturing and mannered expressions found in films like Kobayashi's, all of which derive from the conventions of the kabuki stage. (The 'kabuki-fied' behaviour of samurai and ronin in most *jidai-geki*, incidentally, was not Kurosawa's invention but a throwback to the origins of Japanese cinema in films of kabuki performers.) Miike also rejects the blustery visual rhetoric of Kobayashi's film: no crude zooms, no



Edge of darkness: Ichikawa Ebizo

tilted angles, no dark expressionism in the compositions or performances.

Whether or not he's an auteur, Miike has always said that he's ready to tackle any project – extremist or family-friendly – of which he feels he can make something. Here, as in his brilliant Ealing-style comedy *Shangri-la (Togenkyo no Hitobito, 2002)*, he zeroes in on the class-conflict angle (samurai haves versus ronin have-nots), while exploring the techniques of 3D and assessing its aesthetic potential. Amongst his conclusions: it's all but impossible to render snowfall realistically in 3D, but slow dissolves in 3D (he uses them to show seasons changing) have an intense, almost abstract beauty.

♦♦ Tony Rayns

CREDITS

Produced by
Nakazawa Toshiki
Jeremy Thomas

Producers
Shiraishi Toichiro
Sekine Shingo
Hattori Toru
Zushi Kensuke
Uchida Yasushi
Yokoyama Shinjiro
Saka Misako
Maeda Sigeji
Screenplay
Yamagishi Kikumori
Based on the story *Ibun ronin ki* by Takiguchi Yasuhiko

Director of Photography
Nobuyasu Kita
Lighting Designer
Yoshimi Watabe

Art Director
Hayashida Yuji
Editor
Yamashita Kenji
Music
Sakamoto Ryuichi

Sound Recordist
Jun Nakamura
Costume Designer
Kurosawa Kazuko
Sword Action Coordinator
Tsuji Keiji

© "Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai" Film Partners
Production Companies
Sedic International, Dentsu, Shochiku, Kodansha, OLM, Recorded Picture Company, Yamanashi Nichinichi Shimbun, YBS, Amuse Soft Entertainment, Yahoo! Japan, Asahi Shimbun & Shochiku present a Hanway Films release of a "Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai" Film Partners production
A Takashi Miike film
Executive Producers
Hattori Yo
Noda Suketsugu

Irie Yoshio
Okuno Toshiaki
Noguchi Akemiko
Noguchi Eiichi
Hatanaka Tatsuro
Machida Tomoko
Kitano Hiroaki

CAST

Ichikawa Ebizo
Tsukumo Hanshiro
Eita
Chijiwa Motome
Mitsushima Hikari
Miho
Takenaka Naoto
Tajiri
Aoki Munetaka
Omotaka Hikokuro
Arai Hirofumi
Matsusaki Hayatonosho
Namioka Kazuki
Kawabe Umanosuke
Amano Yoshihisa
Sasaki
Hira Takehiro
Lord Li Kamononokami
Naotaka

Takahashi Ipppei
Naito
Saito Ayumu
Fujita
Daimon Goro
landlord
Sasano Takashi
priest
Nakamura Baijaku
Chijiwa Jinnai
Yakusho Koji
Saito Kageyu

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
3D
Subtitles

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

Japanese theatrical title
Ichime

Hard Boiled Sweets

United Kingdom 2011
Director: David L G Hughes
Certificate 15 84m 25s

Writing about the cycle of British gangster films predominantly funded by National Lottery money and released around the turn of the millennium, Steve Chibnall, in his essay 'Travels in Ladland', distinguished between 'Gangster Heavy' (the likes of *Gangster No. 1* and *Sexy Beast*) and 'Gangster Light' (take your pick from *Circus*, *Rancid Aluminium* and *Love, Honour & Obey*); the latter he argued were characterised by their faux (not to be confused with fake) postmodern excesses. This digitally shot debut feature from David Hughes, developed from his own short *A Girl and a Gun* (echoes of Guy Ritchie working up *The Hard Case* into *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*), might in this analysis require a fresh category, along the lines of 'Gangster Featherweight': the border here between affectionate genre pastiche and asinine parody is hard to ascertain.

The script's conceit is that each cast member is endowed with a confectionery-related name. Thus the old-school criminal is 'the Imperial Mint', the boss's moll is 'the Sherbert Lemon' and the abusive pimp is 'the Chocolate Lime'. Although the title may allude to Elmore Leonard's pared-down prose style, the film's attempts to situate Southend as a sort of British Las Vegas, courtesy of helicopter shots, the colour-coding of interiors and some neon-lit facades, feel distinctly half-hearted.

Whereas *A Girl and a Gun* focused on Ian Hart's double-crossed driver, Hughes attempts to broaden proceedings in this full-length feature by flipping between the actions and voiceovers of an array of dim-witted characters, all of whom are in pursuit of a stash of money. There's none of the sexual dread that infected Paul Andrew Williams's *London to Brighton* (2006), nor the vivid sense of the rundown seaside environment that infused Pawel Pawlikowski's vision of Margate in *Last Resort* (2000).

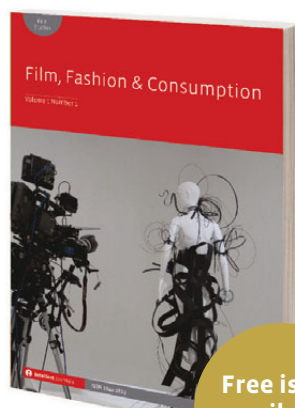
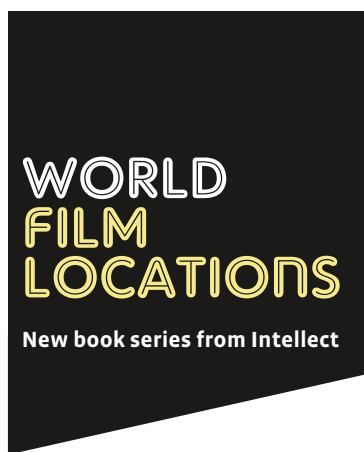
Everyone in *Hard Boiled Sweets* has their reasons for getting their hands on the money: Porsche doesn't want to 'live poor', Fred needs to finance an IVF treatment; Eddie's in hock to rival mobsters. As if in riposte to his film's male-dominated generic predecessors, Hughes allows his female leads to triumph over their male oppressors. En route they may be beaten up, sexually abused or subjected to misogynistic 'jokes', but hey, not to worry, because they are *actually* lulling their persecutors into a false sense of security, and demonstrating that gender is a performance rather than something inherently 'natural'. Well that's this critic's perversely fanciful interpretation. What's certain is that those seeking a *Long Good Friday*-style state-of-the-nation allegory should look elsewhere.

♦♦ Thomas Dawson

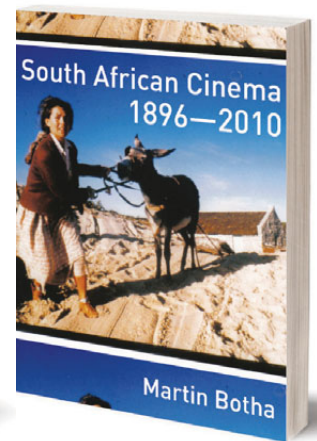
SYNOPSIS Edo, 1635. Poor ronin Tsukumo Hanshiro presents himself at the mansion of the Ii Clan, requesting permission to die honourably by hara-kiri in the courtyard. Senior retainer Saito Kageyu tries to dissuade him by telling the story of a younger ronin, Chijiwa Motome, who came with the same request in 1634: Saito and his lieutenants Tajiri, Omotaka, Matsusaki and Kawabe judged that the young man was actually hoping for charity and so forced him to go through with suicide, aiming to deter others. Chijiwa died in extreme agony, using a bamboo replica sword. Tsukumo insists on performing hara-kiri regardless and requests Omotaka as his second. Informed that Omotaka, Matsusaki and Kawabe are missing, Saito realises that something is amiss. Tsukumo explains: Chijiwa was his son-in-law, married to his daughter Miho; they had an infant son, Kingo. Bereft by the dissolution of their clan in 1619, they all lived in a tumbledown shack, selling their possessions to survive. Near to starving, they despaired when Miho and Kingo both fell ill. They knew nothing of Motome's 'suicide bluff' until Ii retainers delivered his corpse to the shack. Tsukumo began planning revenge. He cornered Omotaka, Matsusaki and Kawabe and humiliated them by severing their topknots... which he now tosses to the ground in front of Saito. A furious swordfight erupts, and Tsukumo takes down many Ii retainers (and smashes the clan's ceremonial armour) before surrendering to their blades. When Lord Ii later visits the mansion, Saito assures him that everything is in order.

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CREDITS

Produced by

David L G Hughes
Lara Greenway
Demelza Jones
Michael Riley

Written by

David L G Hughes

Director of

Photography

Sara Deane

Editor

Lloyd George

Production Designer

Chloe Brady

Music

Tom E Morrison

Sound

David Martell

Costume Designer

Charmaine Parram

Liz May Brice

Gemma

Paul Freeman

'Shrewd' Eddie

Ty Glaser

Porsche

Laura Greenwood

Delta

Ian Hart

Joyce

Danny Sapani

Leroy

Nathaniel Martello-

White

Jermaine

Peter Wight

Jimmy 'The Gent'

Scot Williams

Johnny

René Zagger

Fred

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Verve Pictures

7,597 ft +8 frames

CAST

Philip Barantini

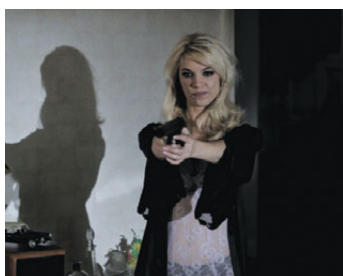
Dean

Elizabeth Berrington

Jackie

Adrian Bower

'Daddy' Gerry



Sweets and sour: Ty Glaser

SYNOPSIS

UK, the present. Sixtysomething London-based gangster Jimmy the Gent is given one week to pay off two rival criminals, Leroy and Jermaine. Johnny is released from prison and is picked up by corrupt plain-clothes police officer Fred, who drives him to Southend. He explains that Johnny is expected to burgle the domestic safe of crime boss Shrewd Eddie. Jimmy the Gent, who is senior to Eddie in their criminal organisation, also travels to Southend, in order to collect money from Eddie. Violent local pimp Gerry intends to use teenage prostitute Delta to steal the briefcase carried by Jimmy, which contains vast sums of money. Eddie's much younger girlfriend Porsche is scheming with his driver and her lover Dean to abscond with Eddie's cash. Johnny attacks and kills Fred, disposing of the body by throwing it off the pier. Eddie executes Dean. Eddie invites Johnny to his house, where the latter is seduced by Porsche. Slipping sleeping pills into Jimmy and Eddie's drinks, Porsche and Delta disappear with the briefcase. Jermaine, who has been tailing Jimmy, turns up at Eddie's house and shoots Johnny. Leroy arrives; the resulting standoff leaves him, Jermaine and Eddie dead. Porsche and Delta encounter Gerry in the drive, shoot him in the testicles and speed off in his sports car.



Fighting talk: Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson

The Hunger Games

USA 2012

Director: Gary Ross

Certificate 12A 142m 18s

Panem et circenses – bread and circuses – is how the satirist Juvenal described the empty distractions doled out by Rome's political elite to appease and stultify the plebs. Panem is also, significantly, the name of the post-apocalyptic dystopia in Suzanne Collins's bestselling 2008 'young adult' novel *The Hunger Games*, in which a decadent Capitol keeps its proletarian subjects in check with an annual gladiatorial circus, televised live as a tool of mass oppression, and 'performed' by 12 pairs of adolescent male and female 'tributes' chosen by lot from their respective districts. In an expansive, controlled arena, the victor is the last boy or girl left standing.

Collins got the idea for her novel (and its two sequels) from channel-surfing between reality-television programming and actual war footage, making it appropriate that her story should return to the audiovisual medium that originally inspired it and that features so prominently in it. Of course this sort of material has previously appeared in films as diverse as *Punishment Park* (1971), *Rollerball* (1975), *The Running Man* (1987), *Battle Royale* (2000) and *Series 7: The Contenders* (2001) – but never before has it been targeted specifically at a tween/teen demographic. The result feels somewhat compromised: a film built around a grand spectacle of violence, brutality and death, but one that carefully avoids reproducing such spectacle for its young, impressionable viewers. Combat scenes are largely presented in a blurry handheld style that implies carnage without showing it directly (and in Britain, seven seconds of footage were subjected to "visual cuts, visual darkenings and the digital removal of sight of blood" at the request of the BBFC, to enable the granting of an all-important 12A certificate).

What remains is a triumph of restraint – but had the film been more visceral and less sanitised it

might have better implicated viewers in the voyeuristic bloodlust of its entertainment, leading to (uncomfortable) identification with the Capitol's grotesque, baying crowds. As it is, we are let off the hook, invited to tut at the screen in easy moral disapproval, and never confronted with our own ugly reflection. Similarly disappointing are subtle changes to the characterisation of central protagonist Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence). Her first kill, expressly an act of vengeful rage in the novel, becomes a defensive reflex in the film; and where in the novel her relationship-in-the-spotlight with fellow competitor Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) is portrayed equivocally, only to be devastatingly disambiguated

in the final pages, in the film the ambiguity is maintained, in service to the inevitable sequel. The effect is to transform a complicated, difficult figure into a less interesting saint.

Still, Lawrence brings an intense conviction to the role, and her previous, similar turn in *Winter's Bone* (2010) helps flesh out, through cinematic shorthand, a character whom we get to know in the novel through an internal monologue thankfully absent here. Meanwhile, Katniss's original first-person narrative and restricted perspective are wisely replaced with regular cutaways to the control room, commentary box and presidential garden – lifting the curtain on the whole macabre circus. ♦♦ Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by

Nina Jacobson
Jon Kilik

Screenplay

Gary Ross
Suzanne Collins
Billy Ray

Based on the novel by
Suzanne Collins

Director of

Photography

Tom Stern

Edited by

Stephen Mirriore
Juliette Welfling

Production Designer

Philip Messina

Music

James Newton Howard

Sound Design &

Supervision

Lon Bender

Costume Designer

Judianna Makovsky

Visual Effects

Hybride Technologies

Rising Sun Pictures

Clearcut FX

Pixomondo

Digiscopie

Whiskytree Inc.

Visual Effects

& Animation

Rhythm & Hues Studios

Stunt Co-ordinator

Chad Stahelski

©Lions Gate Films Inc.

Production

Companies

Lionsgate presents a

Color Force/Lionsgate

production

A Gary Ross film

Executive Producers

Robin Bissell

Suzanne Collins

Louise Rosner-Meyer

Primrose Everdeen

Dolby/Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

Prints by

DeLuxe

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

12,807 ft +0 frames

(after cuts of 7 seconds,
including cuts made by
substitution)

CAST

Jennifer Lawrence

Katniss Everdeen

Josh Hutcherson

Peeta Mellark

Liam Hemsworth

Gale Hawthorne

Woody Harrelson

Haymitch Abernathy

Elizabeth Banks

Effie Trinket

Lenny Kravitz

Cinna

Stanley Tucci

Caesar Flickerman

Donald Sutherland

President Snow

Wes Bentley

Seneca Crane

Willow Shields



The Reich stuff: Tilo Prückner, Götz Otto

Iron Sky

Finland/Germany/
Australia/Norway 2012

Director: Timo Vuorensola

A six-year production period, during which the Finnish filmmakers appealed to the online community for both funding and story contributions, allowed this schlock sci-fi frolic to build up a considerable internet buzz. It certainly demonstrates the kind of crowd-sourced enthusiasm that can be generated by a witty teaser trailer and a snappy tagline – “In 1945 Nazis went to the moon, in 2018 they’re coming back” – but the disappointing finished result underlines the fact that there’s quite some distance from sales pitch to fully imagined narrative, and even a laugh-out-loud central conceit can’t carry a movie on its own.

With its steampunk vision of antique future technology, *Iron Sky* has fun imagining just what a Nazi base on the moon would look like, what with its swastika-shaped citadel and lumbering chain-driven spacecraft. The arrival of an African-American astronaut – the first real black man these scions of the Reich have ever seen – sheds some light on the racist ideology underpinning their community values. Without a single significant Jewish character in the story, however, there’s a sense that the film has decided it’s easier to make fun of the Nazis if the humour doesn’t

engage too deeply with what they really stand for – hence they become a cartoon foe attacking Earth as events devolve into a spin on *Mars Attacks!* (1996), with strangled vowels and Wehrmacht uniforms instead of little green men. Like Tim Burton’s picture, this one also flogs its key gag way beyond the point where it stops being funny, and although there’s a deft bit of business when the nice-but-dim Nazi schoolteacher who’s been showing her young charges a compacted cut of *The Great Dictator* has her eyes opened by seeing Chaplin’s full version at an NYC rep cinema, much of the second half of the action consists of facile US-bashing.

We smile at first at 2018’s appallingly crass Palin-alike Madam President, her vixenish campaign coordinator and the nuke-blasting space cruiser named after George W. Bush, yet taking a rise out of the Yanks leaves the story with two sets of villains battling it out, rendering the action even less involving than before. Suggesting that US voters would cheer at a president parroting Nazi invective is certainly a provocation, but it doesn’t hit home with any real effect when the dialogue is so clunky and the workaday cast struggle to achieve anything resembling effective comic timing. Director Timo Vuorensola evidently needed performers who could play it straight yet still signal that they were in on the joke, but one suspects his funds didn’t stretch to that sort of talent.

It’s a shame that the misfiring humour drags the film down, but the uninvolved action sequences prove

just as much of a liability, since Vuorensola lacks the skills to turn the multitude of explosions into any sort of kinetic drive. The degree of spectacle *Iron Sky* is able to muster on screen given its modest budget is remarkable indeed, but the end product is definitely one of those instances of a movie failing to deliver the madcap ride promised by its trailer. If Gareth Edwards’s *Monsters* (2010) showed just what was possible when homebrew technology meshed with a singular creative vision, *Iron Sky* warns us how a heroic production effort can prove largely futile when the creative vision guiding it simply isn’t strong enough.

♦♦ Trevor Johnston

CREDITS

Producers

Tero Kaukomaa
Samuli Torssonen
Oliver Damian
Cathy Overett
Mark Overett

Screenplay

Michael Kalesniko
Timo Vuorensola

Based on a Story

Johanna Sinisalo
Jarmo Puskala

Original Concept

Mika Orasmaa

Director of Photography

Mika Orasmaa

Edited by

Suresh Ayyar

Production Designer

Ulrika Von Vegesack

Music

Laibach

Sound Design

Heiko Müller

Costume Designer

Jake Collier

Visual Effects

Energia Productions

Filmgate AB

Fido

Production Companies

Blind Spot Pictures

Energia Productions

27 Films Production

New Holland Pictures

A Tero Kaukomaa production

A Timo Vuorensola film

Created in collaboration with the Iron Sky

Internet Community

Produced with the support of Finnish Film

Foundation (Kaisu Isto),

Eurimages, Nordisk Film

& TV Fond (Hanne

Palmquist), DFFF -

Deutscher

Filmförderfonds,

HessenInvestFilm (Polia

Bauer, Ursula Vossen)

Co-financed by and

produced with the

assistance of Screen

Queensland

With the support of the

MEDIA Programme of

the European Union in

co-operation YLE/Erkki

Astala, Nordea (Tuire

Laakkonen), Finnvera

(Jaakko Tuomela),

Commerzbank Berlin

(Michael Gens, Achim

Thielmann)

Executive Producers

Jason Piette

Sean O’Kelly

Michael Cowan

San Fu Maltha

CAST

Julia Dietze

Renate Richter

Götz Otto

Klaus Adler

Christopher Kirby

James Washington

Peta Sergeant

Vivian Wagner

Stephanie Paul

The President

Tilo Prückner

Doctor Richter

Michael Cullen

Secretary of Defence

Udo Kier

Wolfgang Kortzfleisch

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Revolver Entertainment

SYNOPSIS In 2018, the US spacecraft Liberty lands on the moon to promote the female president’s re-election campaign. Black astronaut James Washington discovers a chemical processing plant with stocks of Helium-3, but he is then captured by Nazi stormtroopers. In the Nazis’ lunar citadel, schoolteacher Renate Richter reminds her pupils how their forefathers escaped to the moon from Germany in 1945, and have long hoped to return to Earth with a message of universal brotherhood. The discovery that Washington’s smartphone enables a grounded Nazi spacecraft to fly sends Renate’s ambitious fiancé Adler to New York with Renate and Washington (who’s been turned white by Renate’s scientist father). Presidential campaign manager Vivian Wagner gets them access to the president, who’s soon boosting her poll ratings by adapting Adler’s Nazi invective. Adler later summons a full-scale attack on the US by the Nazi fleet. Renate, realising the error of her ways, returns to the moon with Washington to try to halt the Nazi invasion. With the vicious Wagner in command, the US inflicts serious damage on the lunar Nazis’ civilian populace before Washington and Renate destroy the Nazis’ troop-carrier. Renate kills Adler. The discovery that the US had been hoarding Helium-3 on the moon to ensure its global dominance in any future energy crisis causes the international community to unite against it. As Renate and Washington look forward to a new lunar society, nuclear conflict erupts on Earth.

Jeff, Who Lives at Home

USA 2011

Directors: Jay Duplass,
Mark Duplass

Certificate 15 82m 53s

The titular Jeff (played by Jason Segel), an unemployed 30-year-old whose life might appear to lack direction, begins this film advising a dictaphone and the audience that, as in M. Night Shyamalan’s *Signs* (2002), what seems to be a series of unconnected events contains a logic that will become apparent later. It’s the kind of conceit used regularly in the sometimes ingenious time-jumping sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*, in which Segel also stars, and the Duplass brothers’ characteristically half-baked approach suffers from the inevitable comparison. There is nothing artful about their contrivances: the main plot’s four turning points rely on the protagonists ‘randomly’ crossing paths. At the end of this twistless tale, Jeff’s theory is confirmed: everything is indeed connected.

Jeff, running an errand for his mother Sharon (Susan Sarandon), bumps into his brother Pat (Ed Helms); together they happen to see Pat’s wife Linda (Judy Greer), whom they decide to follow, thinking that she might be having an affair; they chance upon her again separately at a motel with a male friend; then do so yet again together at the film’s conclusion, also coming across Sharon, who has gone through a subplot of her own to get there. Along the way Pat realises that he has been a terrible husband; Sharon, widowed in middle age, entertains the possibility of a more intimate relationship with her best friend Carol (Rae Dawn Chong); the two brothers, estranged since their father’s early death, are reconciled; and Linda, moved by the prospect, finds it in her to forgive Pat. There are hugs all round, though no sign that Jeff will move out.

As played by Helms, Pat, a buttoned-down, fully employed thirtysomething whose energies are badly misdirected (we meet him telling his appalled wife that he has bought a sports car they can’t really afford), is the schematic opposite of Jeff, but their conflict is one-sided both dramatically and at the level of performance. The trend of casting sitcom actors in Sundance-type films – this year’s festival was practically an away-day for the cast of NBC’s *Parks and Recreation* – isn’t always for the best. Segel manages to straddle the small and big screens without evident strain; though lumbered with an obligatory ‘smoking a bong on the sofa’ scene early on in *Jeff*, he doesn’t lean too heavily on stoner schtick. Helms, by contrast, is a limited performer whose ‘unlovable loser’ persona is best taken in small doses, as in *The Office*. Greer, on the other hand, known for a string of cancelled sitcoms, is excellent as Linda, but Pat is so manifestly unpleasant that it’s hard to see how she ended up with him.



Domestic obtuse: Ed Helms

← The Duplasses' ascent from mumblecores to boutique-division indie has not made their aesthetic (to dignify it) – the film equivalent of pre-distressed jeans – any more excusable. For the most part their signature move, the vaguely motivated zoom, is merely mildly distracting, but the casting of Segel and Helms brings the question into new relief. *How I Met Your Mother* is a traditional 'three-camera' sitcom, *The Office* a mockumentary; *Jeff*, *Who Lives at Home* wouldn't have suffered from being

shot in the style of either. The Duplasses' ineptitude mars in particular a would-be pivotal scene in which Jeff and Pat argue and then fight at their father's grave. Both sons are obviously differently affected by their father's death but the script is too cool to dig deep, while any potential emotion is leached from the moment by the directors' similarly lackadaisical approach to staging. A plinky-plonk soundtrack does the heavy lifting.

♦♦ Henry K. Miller

CREDITS

Produced by
Lianne Halfon
Russell Smith
Jason Reitman
Written by
Jay Duplass
Mark Duplass
Director of Photography
Jas Shelton
Edited by
Jay Deuby
Production Designer
Chris Spellman
Music
Michael Andrews
Sound Mixer
Robert Sharman

Costume Designer
Meagan McLaughlin

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Production Companies
Paramount Vantage and Indian Paintbrush present a Right of Way production in association with Mr. Mudd
A Duplass Brothers film
Executive Producers
Steven Rales
Helen Estabrook

CAST

Jason Segel
Jeff
Ed Helms
Pat
Judy Greer
Linda
Susan Sarandon
Sharon
Rae Dawn Chong
Carol
Steve Zissis
Steve
Evan Ross
Kevin
Benjamin Bickham
TV pitchman

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

7459 ft + 8 frames

John Carter

USA 2012

Director: Andrew Stanton

Certificate 12A 131m 51s

Director Andrew Stanton is a self-confessed fan of John Carter of Mars, who turns 100 in 2012. First introduced in a 1912 magazine serial, Carter was eclipsed by another fantasy hero born that year – Tarzan, who was also dreamed up by Carter's creator, Edgar Rice Burroughs. A century on, Carter may be fighting another unequal battle.

On his side are aficionados of pulp and early SF, who see *Carter* as an urtext for today's popular fantasy, including *Star Wars* and its sequels and prequels; *Flash Gordon* (both the 1930s cliffhangers and the 1980s glam-pantomime film version); and today's box-office champion, *Avatar*. In this light, turning *John Carter* into a 21st-

century blockbuster is an act of historic reclamation, like reissuing *Metropolis*.

Stanton's version of *John Carter* steadfastly refuses to update its titular hero. As in Burroughs's stories, Carter is a former Confederate soldier in the aftermath of the Civil War, whisked into the alien conflicts of Mars. In the film, Carter's young nephew – one Edgar Rice Burroughs (Daryl Sabara) – opens his uncle's journal and reads avidly, as if to remind us that SF began with the word, not with cinema. The problem is that for casual viewers and younger SF fans, *John Carter* just looks like another genre product, with plain similarities to many of the titles listed above. Its proximity to *Avatar* is especially awkward. In both films, the human protagonist finds a cause and an identity on an alien world, in conflicts that resonate with American (and Native American) history.

True, *Avatar*'s world and cast were made or remade in CGI; *John Carter* is markedly more 'real', with Utah



Mars mellow: Taylor Kitsch, Lynn Collins

SYNOPSIS Nineteenth-century America. A telegram summons young Edgar Rice Burroughs to the mansion of his uncle, explorer John Carter. Burroughs is told that Carter has died, and reads his journal.

Thirteen years earlier, former Confederate soldier Carter seeks gold in Arizona. Fleeing Apaches and the military, he enters a mountain cave where a stranger materialises and attacks him. The stranger's medallion glows, and Carter finds himself in a desert where the low gravity allows him to leap immense distances. He is captured by four-armed aliens, the Tharks. He witnesses a battle between two human-like factions, the Heliumites and the Zodangans. Carter rescues a Heliumite princess, Dejah Thoris. He learns that he is on Mars, which its inhabitants call Barsoom. Carter sets out to find a way home, accompanied by Thoris and Sola, pariah daughter of Thark leader Tars Tarkas.

Thoris's father presses her to make peace by marrying the Zodangan ruler, Sab Than. Carter encounters Matai Shang, the secret power behind Than. Shang is a mythical being called a Thern, shaping Martian history for his own ends. Carter returns to the Tharks, defeating the brutish Tal Hajus, who has usurped Tarkas, and leading an attack during the wedding of Thoris and Than. Shang kills Than and escapes. Carter marries Thoris, but Shang banishes him to Earth.

Carter spends years seeking another medallion to return to Mars. The journal claims he finally succeeded. At Carter's mausoleum, Burroughs is menaced by a Thern, whom Carter shoots. Carter never found a medallion, but faked his death as a ruse to lure the Thern to his home. Armed with a new medallion, he returns to Mars and Thoris.

SYNOPSIS Baton Rouge, the present. Jeff, a 30-year-old slacker who lives at home, is asked by his mother Sharon to buy some wood glue and fix a kitchen cabinet. Convinced by a misdirected phone call asking for Kevin that he is destined to cross paths with someone called Kevin, Jeff is distracted by a basketball player of that name, who later robs him. Jeff then happens upon his uptight, angry brother Pat, who is in the midst of a row with his wife Linda.

Meanwhile Sharon, at work, receives messages from a secret admirer in the office. When the brothers see Linda with another man, they decide to follow her. Though they are briefly separated after squabbling at their father's grave, both end up at a motel where they find and confront Linda. Pat badly mishandles the situation and Linda decides to leave him. Sharon's admirer turns out to be her close female friend Carol. They decide to run off to New Orleans together.

Pat, Jeff, Linda, Sharon and Carol all become stuck in a traffic jam on a bridge. Jeff sees that a car has gone over the side, and jumps into the water to help. He rescues two girls and their father Kevin before getting into difficulty himself, whereupon Pat jumps in and saves him. Pat and Linda are tentatively reunited. Sharon and Carol enter into a closer relationship. Jeff fixes the cabinet.

doubling for Mars, and the hero (Taylor Kitsch) retaining his humanity by virtue of not being painted over by computer artists. (Ironically, Stanton is famous for directing two CGI cartoons, *Finding Nemo* and *Wall-E*.) But there are still huge dollpops of CGI augmenting the scenery and cast: supporting actors Willem Dafoe and Samantha Morton become towering, tasked, green-skinned aliens, with just a sliver of their customary expressive force.

Many central images are fastidiously 'retro': Carter's most spectacular Martian power is that he can leap impossible heights and distances, like the earliest comic Superman; the flying alien vessels are more akin to Jules Verne than *Star Wars*; and the desert scenery and scanty costumes are unadorned oriental fantasy.

John Carter is lent most personality by its humour – the hero is shown as a superpowered stumblebum, trying to cope with Mars's trampolining gravity, or getting slapped on the head by Dafoe's alien when he leads an army the wrong way. Unfortunately, these moments are oases in an adventure more earnest than exciting. Viewers and critics who hated *Avatar* may prefer *John Carter*'s unpretentiousness (and the fact that it's nearly an hour shorter) but, for all the goodwill on display, the deserts of Mars feel a bit arid beside the screen lushness of Pandora. **Andrew Osmond**

CREDITS

Produced by
Jim Morris
Lindsey Collins
Colin Wilson
Screenplay
Andrew Stanton
Mark Andrews
Michael Chabon
Based on the story *A Princess of Mars* by
Edgar Rice Burroughs
Director of Photography
Dan Mindel
Edited by
Eric Zumbrunnen
Production Designer
Nathan Crowley
Music
Michael Giacchino
Sound Mixer
Chris Munro
Costume Designer
Mayes C. Rubeo
Stunt Co-ordinator
Tom Struthers
Visual Effects
Double Negative
Cinesite
MPC
Additional:
Nvisible FX
Destroy All Monsters

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Production Company
The Walt Disney Company

CAST

Taylor Kitsch
John Carter
Lynn Collins
Dejah Thoris
Samantha Morton
Sola
Mark Strong
Matai Shang
Ciarán Hinds
Tardos Mors
Dominic West
Sab Than
James Purefoy
Kantos Kan

Bryan Cranston
Powell
Polly Walker
Sarkoja
Daryl Sabara
Edgar Rice Burroughs
Thomas Haden Church
Tal Hajus
Willem Dafoe
Tars Tarkas

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
Colour by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

11,866 ft 8 frames

IMAX prints
132m 44s
191,133 ft

Front credits title
John Carter
End credits title
John Carter of Mars

Le Havre

**Finland/France/
Germany/Norway 2011**
Director: Aki Kaurismäki
Certificate PG 93m 27s

With their stagey compositions, mannered gestures and paintbox hues, Aki Kaurismäki's films have a storybookish quality that's comforting even when his characters find themselves in dire strife. The backbone of *Le Havre* is a tale of cooperation in the service of a virtuous goal so elemental that it could be a children's fable, or a socially conscious silent film from Charlie Chaplin's oeuvre: a community joins forces to aid a beleaguered innocent, and is rewarded with triumph. A sequence in which African child refugee Idrissa (Blondin Miguel) is transported to Le Havre's docks in a vegetable barrow is cartoon-cute; elsewhere, the near-death of the protagonist's wife is depicted in a deadpan-dramatic mode that references 1950s melodrama (and resonates with Kaurismäki's fondness for classical, studio-style lighting and 1950s decor and furnishings). The danger with such self-aware presentation is that quirky gives way to cutesy, and faux-naïveté to the real thing. But with this 17th feature film – his second entirely in French, and a follow-up of sorts to the previous one, 1992's *La Vie de Bohème* – Kaurismäki displays a sustained grace in negotiating the boundary between bathos and true poignancy. Indeed, the management of boundaries – national ones, legal ones, personal ones – is the recurrent theme of *Le Havre*; its thoughtfully evoked political context and subtle moral ambiguity lend it texture and depth. Its universe is further bulked out by its references to Kaurismäki's previous films, and to his beloved French New Wave, symbolised by the brief appearance of Jean-Pierre Léaud as a police informer.

Marcel Marx (André Wilms), seen as a struggling playwright in *La Vie de Bohème*, is now living with his loving wife Arletty (Kati Outinen) in the port town of Le Havre, and scraping a living shining shoes. Instinctive goodness and a residual resistance to authority drive him to endanger himself by aiding Idrissa. That Idrissa, along with the other Africans Marcel encounters, is portrayed as faultlessly cultured, kind and polite risks pitching the film into a sort of post-ironic fairytale idealism, as does Arletty's miraculous recovery from (presumably) cancer. But Kaurismäki finds shades of grey elsewhere, in his evocation of working-class and immigrant communities adrift from conventional power structures and sustained by cynicism, canniness and tribal loyalty. Authority is faceless and disconnected – the chief of police, advocating the pursuit and entrapment of Idrissa, appears as a voice only – and Christian doctrine an unreliable guide. Assured by her doctor that "miracles happen", the ailing Arletty retorts, "Not in my neighbourhood." Superstition is a luxury those at her economic level can



Going coastal: André Wilms, Jean-Pierre Darroussin

ill afford. Nor is prelapsarian sinlessness a desirable state: told by Inspector Monet (Jean-Pierre Darroussin) that he's "not innocent", Marcel rejoins with pride, "And I never have been."

'Bohemian' values – cooperation, creativity, ethical flexibility, sexual freedom – are not only evoked in names (Marx, Arletty, Monet) but emerge as constant challenges to bourgeois expectations. In the end it is always deception, not truth, that sets these characters free. Their most courageous moments entail deliberate falsehoods: Marcel and Inspector Monet both lie to protect Idrissa; Arletty opts to protect the husband she calls "a big child" from the knowledge that she is dying. Romantic love represents a stronger call to action than any moral imperative. If Marcel doesn't quite undertake his mission to save Idrissa

as a deal with God to earn Arletty's survival, he certainly uses it as a distraction to get through her troubling absence; and the pivotal assistance of local celeb 'Little Bob' (Roberto Piazza) in the plan proves dependent upon the solution of a calamitous marital dispute. Thus, for all its visual stylisation and mordant jokiness, *Le Havre* is brought to life by its raw, hopeful humanity; it feels close and real despite its deliberate distance. Still, whether the film's almost shockingly wish-fulfilling conclusion unbalances it with too much deadpan schmaltz, comments drily on cinema's compulsion to play God by punishing and rewarding characters' deeds, or simply confounds cynicism by allowing the best to happen, is a point for post-show discussion.

Hannah McGill

CREDITS

Produced by
Aki Kaurismäki
Producers
Fabienne Vonier
Reinhard Brundig
Written by
Aki Kaurismäki
Director of Photography
Timo Salminen
Editor
Timo Linnasalo
Art Director
Wouter Zoon
Sound Recorder
Tero Malmberg
Costumes
Fred Cambier

©Sputnik Oy, Pyramide Productions, Pandora Film, ARTE France Cinéma

Production Companies

Sputnik Oy with Pyramide Productions and Pandora Film present in co-production with ARTE France Cinéma and ZDF/Arte with the participation of Fondation Finlandaise de la Cinématographie, Canal+, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image animée, YLE Co-productions, CinéCinéma, ARTE France, Région Haute-Normandie, Arte GEIE Supported by Région Haute-Normandie in partnership with CNC and in association with Pôle Image Haute-

Normandie a film by Aki Kaurismäki
A Sputnik Oy, Pyramide Productions, Pandora Film production
Executive Producer
Finland:
Hanna Hemilä

CAST

André Wilms
Marcel Marx
Kati Outinen
Arletty
Jean-Pierre Darroussin
Inspector Monet
Blondin Miguel
Idrissa
Elina Salo
Claire
Evelyn Didi
Yvette
Quoc-Dung Nguyen
Chang

Laika
Laika
François Monnié
grocer
Roberto Piazza a.k.a. Little Bob
Little Bob
Pierre Étaix
Doctor Becker
Jean-Pierre Léaud
denouncer

Dolby Digital In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

8,410 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS *Le Havre*, 2009. At the railway station, bohemian-turned-shoeshiner Marcel Marx shines the shoes of a dapper man in the midst of a mysterious standoff with two others; the man flees, and shots are heard. Marcel goes home to his wife Arletty, who is concealing an illness from him. Next morning at the docks, police including Inspector Monet discover a container full of refugees from Gabon trying to get to London. A young boy, Idrissa, makes a run for it; later, Marcel encounters him, but conceals this when questioned by Monet. Marcel leaves food for the runaway. He comes home to find Arletty collapsed in pain, and takes her to hospital, where she remains. Marcel finds Idrissa hiding in his outhouse, and takes him in. Arletty is told that her condition is terminal, and asks her doctor not to tell Marcel. An informer tells the police Idrissa's whereabouts; Monet discreetly warns Marcel. Marcel looks for Idrissa's family in various refugee camps and finds the boy's grandfather. Promising that he will help Idrissa get to London, Marcel organises a fundraising concert to raise money for the boat journey. Idrissa visits Arletty in hospital. The concert is a success; after a final confrontation with the police and the intervention of Inspector Monet, Idrissa sets sail. Marcel goes to the hospital and finds Arletty cured. The couple go home.

London Paris New York

Director: Anu Menon

Certificate 12A 100m 26s

Anu Menon is a London Film School graduate whose short film *Ravi Goes to School* was shown at both the Edinburgh and Tribeca festivals. Her film-school preoccupations are evident in her feature debut, the derivative *London Paris New York*.

Her protagonist Nikhil attends film school in London and isn't above deriding his fellow students' pretensions of being the next David Lynch, while at the same time admitting that his own student film is intense and heavily Tarkovsky-influenced. And, he candidly tells on-off girlfriend Lalitha, unlike his film-school mates he'll be able to get his picture off the ground thanks to his father being a famous Bollywood producer. Lalitha, meanwhile, is an idealist and political activist with ambitions to bring about societal change; in case we don't get the point about her intellect (Nikhil calls her 'Lalithapedia'), she is shown reading Sven Lindqvist's *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man's Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide*. On the face of it she and Nikhil are polar opposites but, given their pretensions, they are of course soulmates, and thus an ideal cinematic couple.

London Paris New York is just the latest in a slew of recent films (following *Anjaana Anjaani*, *Break Ke Baad*, *Ek Main Aur Ekk Tu* and *Wake Up Sid*) targeted at India's multiplex-going urban audiences, in which the characters have slightly off-kilter occupations and spend



City link: Aditi Rao Hydari, Ali Zafar

a lot of time talking. The central conceit of this film, which requires our acceptance that a couple can fall in love during the course of just three meetings over a seven-year period in the three titular cities, is of course an extension of the premise Richard Linklater created in *Before Sunrise* (1995) and *Before Sunset* (2004). A film that follows two people conversing in three different cities could have descended into a talk-fest but doesn't, thanks to the crisp running time and the intrusion of Bollywood – Menon's leads dance in a London chapel with nuns singing the chorus; Nikhil thinks nothing of busting out his Bollywood moves in a pub.

As with all two-handers, a lot depends on the leads. Ali Zafar and Aditi Rao Hydari manage to keep matters light and breezy while discussing everything from feminism to pheromones. However, for two people who are supposed to be so connected that they can barely keep their paws off each other, there's a distinct lack of chemistry, exacerbated by Zafar's reliance on smug smirks and Hydari's wide-eyed confusion. Alas, these characters aren't new in Indian cinema, having been better explored in Gautham Menon's excellent *Will You Cross the Skies for Me?* (2010).

◆◆ Naman Ramachandran

Marley

USA/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Kevin Macdonald

Certificate 15 145m 15s

Kevin Macdonald's film begins with shots of the Ghanaian fort from which hundreds of thousands of slaves left Africa, and closes with footage attesting to the ongoing global popularity and influence of Bob Marley, the Third World's first musical superstar, some three decades after his early demise from cancer. These bookends are just about the only time this expansive documentary portrait steps outside its biographical brief, preferring to offer an exhaustive chronicle of the events in Marley's life rather than ruminate on their wider significance.

As an over-the-shoulder biography, it's certainly a valuable assembly of archive and testimony – not least because the involvement of the Marley estate lends it a palpable combination of authority and intimacy – yet one yearns for more analysis of how Marley apparently squared the circle of achieving pop stardom without having to airbrush out his defiant Rastafarian beliefs and radical political worldview. Macdonald builds an imposing survey of a lavishly talented individual who touched millions of people, yet goes easy on detailing the substance of his creativity (where album titles such as *Uprising* and *Confrontation* hint at the music's response to the realities of everyday oppression). It could be that the filmmakers felt it best to let the music speak for itself, but the result plays like the culmination of the process by which Marley has been effectively marketed as a charismatic exemplar of some vague, unspecified but ethnically hip rebel cool – a process that began with the original glossy TV campaign and video compilation for his posthumous 1984 singles compilation *Legend*, which went on to sell an estimated 25 million copies worldwide.

As his previous documentary features *One Day in September* (1999) and *Touching the Void* (2003) affirm, Macdonald is very adept at shaping interviews and archive into a pacy narrative. And while *Marley* may be authorised, it's no hagiography, tackling issues such as the singer's white planter father and the prejudice he faced as a mixed-race child (an identity that he felt enabled him to bridge divisions in Jamaican society), negotiating tricky territory like the reasons for the break-up of the original Wailers and

pondering why it was that Marley latterly played to largely white audiences. It's also a helpful guide to the turbulent political landscape of 1970s Jamaica and Marley's courageous involvement as a peacemaker between murderously warring left and right. On a personal level, his widow (and ever-present backing singer) Rita comes across as heroically forgiving of her husband's proclivity for fathering children with other women, seemingly accepting that her pain was a price worth paying if it meant that Bob was able to carry on performing and getting his message across to the world.

While the scope of Macdonald's coverage hence encompasses much that's informative, detailing the actual form of Marley's often uncompromising Rastafarian-inspired message comes relatively low in the film's priorities. Indeed, Macdonald shows scant interest in the later albums that followed Marley's breakthrough 1975 live recording at London's Lyceum, while a passing mention for *Exodus* seems decidedly short shrift for the record rated by *Time* magazine as the most important of the entire 20th century. Moreover, for all the vividness of the material Macdonald puts together, the relative paucity of contextualisation results in a certain narrowness of perspective (something that also applies to his previous feature documentaries). Ultimately, the more you know about Marley, the more disappointing you're likely to find this admittedly substantial 144-minute survey. A useful introduction then, but there's so much more to be said about an artist capable of anthems of hate as well as love. This is very much the radio-friendly 'One Love' Marley rather than the Rastafarian firebrand who spat out "Them belly full but we hungry." ◆◆ Trevor Johnston

CREDITS

Produced by

Steve Bing
Charles Steel

Directors of Photography

Alwin Küchler
Mike Eley

Film Editor

Dan Glendenning

Sound Designer

Glenn Freemantle

Additional Music

Steven Price

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Tuff Gong Pictures LP

Production Companies

Shangri-La

Entertainment presents a

Tuff Gong Pictures

production in

association with

Cowboy Films

A film by Kevin

Macdonald

Executive Producers

Ziggy Marley

Chris Blackwell

Film Extracts

Reggae Sunsplash II

(1979)

Land of Look Behind

(1981)

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International UK & Eire

13,072 ft +8 frames

CREDITS

Producers

Shristi Arya

Goldie Behl

Story/Screenplay

Anu Menon

Director of Photography

Sameer Arya

Edited by

Shyam Salgaonkar

Music/Lyrics

Ali Zafar

Background Score

Dhruv Ghanekar

Sound Designer

Gajendra Bhama

Costume Stylists

Mandeep Patheja

Shreya Anand

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Fox Star Studios present

a Rose Movies

production

Executive Producer

Vivek B. Agrawal

CAST

Ali Zafar

Nikhil Chopra

Aditi Rao Hydari

Lalitha Krishnan

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Fox Star Studios

9,039 ft +9 frames

SYNOPSIS London, 2005. Nikhil Chopra and Lalitha Krishnan arrive at Heathrow airport on a delayed flight from Mumbai and strike up a conversation. Lalitha, who is on her way to study politics in New York, misses her connection. Nikhil offers to show her the sights. He's the son of a Bollywood film producer and in London to enrol in film school. Both are escaping from demanding families. They spend the day sightseeing and finding out about each other, and part the next day at the airport with a kiss. Nikhil promises to visit Lalitha in New York in December.

Two years later, Nikhil goes to Paris in search of Lalitha, now studying at the Sorbonne. He didn't make the December rendezvous, because his father feigned a heart attack to engineer a visit from his son. He meets with Lalitha and, after a day spent walking around Paris, they have sex. Watching Nikhil's student film, Lalitha becomes distressed at the sight of the heroine; it transpires that when Nikhil failed to show up in New York, Lalitha flew to London and went to his home; going in unnoticed, she found him in bed with the actress. She tells Nikhil that she won't see him again and that he'll yearn for her.

New York, present day. Nikhil arrives for the premiere of his debut feature and visits Lalitha. She's marrying an American colleague the next day. They wander around the city and fall asleep in each other's arms under the Brooklyn Bridge. In the morning, Lalitha rushes off to her wedding. Nikhil shows up at the church to stop the wedding, only to find that he's at the wrong venue. He goes to Lalitha's apartment and discovers that she called off the wedding at the last minute. They are finally united.

SYNOPSIS A documentary portrait of Robert Nesta 'Bob' Marley (1945-81), tracing his life from humble beginnings as the illegitimate son of a white forestry worker and black teenage mother in rural Jamaica to a career as a global reggae superstar. Using archive material and interviews with family, friends and colleagues, the film tells how Marley discovered music as a means of escape from poverty; after toiling during the 1960s on the local scene he found creative independence performing with Bunny Livingston and Peter Tosh as The Wailers, at the same time embracing Rastafarianism. London-based Island Records introduced the band to a UK audience, but the stresses of touring caused Livingston and Tosh to quit. The band re-emerged as Bob Marley & the Wailers and found international success in the 1970s. In 1976 Marley narrowly survived an assassination attempt; he later appeared at a peace concert where he made the rival white party leaders shake hands.

At the height of his fame he was diagnosed with cancer; he died in 1981, aged 36.

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Pulpit fiction: Vincent Cassel

The Monk

France/Spain 2011
 Director: Dominik Moll
 Certificate 15 100m 14s

In adapting Matthew Lewis's 1796 novel for the screen, director Dominik Moll has created a catalogue of not entirely convincing gothic cinematic tropes. Where his earlier films *Harry, He's Here to Help* (2000) and *Lemming* (2005) held the viewer's gaze by virtue of their exploration of the surreal in the everyday, here Moll seems to have run away with visual effects, forgetting the impressively claustrophobic character relationships that fuelled his earlier work. The result is that *The Monk*, which charts the fall from grace of pious friar Ambrosio (Vincent Cassel), never quite pauses for breath, caught up in a script of contrived theological wisdoms and overly symbolic imagery.

When we first meet Ambrosio he is listening to a disturbing confession of rape and incest. His face – illuminated only by the diffused light of the confessional – is a mixture of disgust and arousal, a quivering revulsion that leans towards curiosity. The opening dialogue, which describes the confessor's fall into the "exquisite abyss" of sin, prefigures Ambrosio's own destiny. And yet it feels hollow, and Ambrosio's assertion that "Satan has only the power we give him" – the psychological conflict at the centre of the film's narrative – seems crude and unconvincing.

Yet if the film lacks subtlety, it nevertheless builds an impressive tide of latent sexuality that swells beneath the cloaks, cassocks and habits of Ambrosio's religious universe. In a critical scene between Ambrosio and the temptress Valerio, Moll cuts between the eerie tension of their confrontation and the poisonous insects that scurry beneath the leaves of the surrounding rose garden. It's a heavily Lynchian scene, borrowing from the opening sequence of *Blue Velvet* (1986), in which the camera burrows into the grass, uncovering the crawling underworld threatening the thin veneer of suburban bliss above. From this scene onwards Moll bombards the audience with a crude parade of

signs indicating sin – licking flames as ravaged sexual desire, snarling gargoyles as impending evil, milky ghosts of the Virgin Mary as Ambrosio's forgotten virtue made manifest. The result often tends towards a Technicolor gothic delirium in which dialogue is drowned by overwhelming cinematography.

Cassel is brilliantly cast as the decadent monk succumbing to his own hubris, giving a surprisingly restrained performance, while as Valerio his co-star Déborah François recalls much of the quiet sexual manipulation of her character in Denis Dercourt's *The Page Turner* (2006). And yet, despite its spectacle, the depiction of the once

shocking triumvirate of sex, Satan and religion feels archaic in Moll's film. In his adaptation of Lewis's novel, originally a scandalous anti-clerical mix of Greek tragedy and Miltonic epic poetry, Moll's direction distils the narrative into a kind of pop-Freudian tale that can be easily depicted on screen, with plenty of dream sequences. Surprisingly, even when compared with older films such as Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971), or Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973), Moll's more classical approach relies on shocks that no longer work, the predictable imagery hollowing out the complexities of the narrative.

Basia Lewandowska Cummings

CREDITS

Produced by
 Michel Saint-Jean
Written by
 Dominik Moll
 Anne-Louise Trividy
 Based on *The Monk* by
 Matthew G. Lewis
Director of Photography
 Patrick Blossier
Editors
 François Gedigier
 Sylvie Lager
Art Director
 Antxon Gómez
Music
 Alberto Iglesias
Sound
 François Maurel
 Gérard Hardy
 Olivier Dô Huu
Costume Designer
 Bina Daigeler

©Diaphana Films.

Morena Films, El Monje, la Película AIE, Estrategia Audiovisual, France 3 Cinéma, 120 Films
Production Companies
 Diaphana Films present in co-production with Morena Films, El Monje, la Película, AIE, Estrategia Audiovisual – Ricardo Fernández-Deu, France 3 Cinéma
 With the participation of Canal+, France Télévisions, CinéCinéma, Televisió de Catalunya, S.A
 In association with Sofica Coficup – Sofica Films, Sofica Soficinéma 6, Banque Postale Image 4, Uni Etoile 8, A Plus Image 2
 With the participation of

Eurimages, Centre national de la cinématographie et de l'image animée, Région Languedoc-Roussillon, ICAA, ICO, MFI, 120 Films
Executive Producer
 Alvaro Longoria

CAST

Vincent Cassel
 Ambrosio
Déborah François
 Valerio
Joséphine Japy
 Antonia
Sergi López
 debaucher
Catherine Mouchet
 Elvire
Jordi Dauder
 Brother Michael
Frédéric Noaille
 Lorenzo

Roxane Duran
 Sister Agnes
Geraldine Chaplin
 abbess
Martine Vandeville
 Leonella
Javivi Gil Valle
 Brother Andrés
Pierre-Félix Gravière
 Brother Iago

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
 Metrodome Distribution Ltd

9,021 ft + 2 frames

French theatrical title
Le Moine

Mozart's Sister

France 2010
 Director: René Féret
 Certificate 12A 120m 5s

René Féret's hypothetical historical drama imagines Maria Anna 'Nannerl' Mozart as something like the Shakespeare's sister of classical-era chamber music, thwarted from matching or surpassing her brother's immortal accomplishments by the systematic sexism of the 18th century. (The idea of Nannerl as a frustrated genius obviously fuels imaginations, having been the subject of a handful of novels in the past decade alone.)

Nannerl is played here by the director's daughter, Marie Féret, in only her third film (the other two were also directed by her father). Despite the obvious element of nepotism behind the casting, she does have the pert strawberry mouth recognisable from portraits of the Mozart prodigies, and a valid teenaged wariness. Her sister Lisa plays Princess Louise Marie, youngest child of Louis XV. This is, one supposes, a tender gift from a father to his daughters, a rebuke to the lack of support shown by Leopold Mozart for his eldest ("Imagine how different our destinies would be if we were born boys," Louise Marie says to Nannerl.) It also adds a touch of incest to the almost flirtatious rapport between the two girls, one of several erotic undercurrents into which *Mozart's Sister* dips a toe.

A mixture of discretion and frankness characterises *Mozart's Sister*. From the first, as Nannerl is seen squatting in a field on a bathroom break, the film announces an intention to reveal the unbuckled 18th century beneath the trusses of courtly decorum, wigs and breeches. It begins as a get-in-the-van-style tour diary, revealing the lack of privacy, the cluttered accommodations and the precarious existence of the Mozarts as they travel around Europe showing off their children's musical talent. Museum-piece chambers, the sort of spaces that actors usually negotiate as though mindful of not breaking anything, are inhabited with a refreshing familiarity and lack of reverence.

Aside from looking back with tacit disapproval on an era's systematic squelching of female ambition, Féret's treatment basically disagrees with L.P. Hartley's notion of the past as a foreign country. These people, Féret insists, are *just like us* beneath the constrictions imposed by society, church and costume – though this repeated insistence on the characters' familiarity makes the alien world they inhabit seem quite inexplicable, as if everyone we see is only waiting to become modern, rather than inhabiting a comprehensive, closed universe with conventions and assumptions and possibilities of its own.

Unlike, say, the female baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi – herself the subject of a 1997 biopic, Agnès Merlet's *Artemisia* – Nannerl left behind no artistic legacy for feminist



Sing out sister: Marie Féret, Clovis Fouin

rediscovery; the work we hear here has been imagined by composer Marie Jeanne Serero. Féret plays freely with history, and shifts the timeline of actual events: most significantly the Dauphin (Clovis Fouin), with whom Nannerl develops a friendship, is a much younger man than he really was in 1765, and the death of his first wife in

labour and his second marriage to Maria Josepha of Saxony are moved forward some 20 years. All of this would be excused if it were in the service of a grand bit of drama, but *Mozart's Sister*, preoccupied with conveying the down-to-earth proximity of the Mozarts' world, makes it seem rather mediocre.

◆◆ **Nick Pinkerton**

CREDITS

Producers
René Féret
Fabienne Féret
Written by
René Féret
Director of Photography
Benjamin Echazarreta
Editor
Fabienne Féret
Art Director
Veronica Fruhbrot
Music
Marie-Jeanne Séréro
Sound Mixers
Agnès Szabo
Emmanuelle Villard
Costume Designer
Dominique Louis

©Les Films Alyne
Production Companies
Les Films Alyne
presents a film by René Féret
With the support of
Région Île de France
With the participation of
Centre national du
cinéma et de l'image
animée
With the support of
Région Limousin
In partnership with
Centre national de la
cinématographie

CAST

Marie Féret
Maria Anna Mozart,
Nannerl
Marc Barbé
Léopold Mozart
Delphine Chuillot
Anna-Maria Mozart
David Moreau
Wolfgang Mozart
Clovis Fouin
Le Dauphin
Lisa Féret
Louise de France
Adèle Leprêtre
Victoire de France
Valentine Duval
Sophie de France
Mona Hefre
Madame Van Eyck

Salomé Stévenin
Isabelle d'Aubusson
Nicolas Giraud
master of music at
Versailles
Arthur Tos
Hugues Le Tourneur

DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Palisades Tartan

10,807 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title
Nannerl, la Sœur de Mozart

Oliver Sherman

Canada 2010

Director: Ryan Redford

Even if the credits hadn't spelled it out, it would be easy to guess that Canadian director Ryan Redford's feature debut was based on a short story ('Veterans'), and a distinguished one at that. Although its author Rachel Ingalls has the merest fraction of the fame of fellow US-born European émigré Patricia Highsmith, she has a similar gift for teasing unsettlingly suspenseful situations out of ostensibly low-key events – in this case, what happens after the still traumatised ex-soldier Sherman Oliver pays a surprise visit to his former colleague Franklin after seven years, only to find that Franklin has settled down with his wife and children, having conquered his demons despite a permanent reminder of his past in the form of a missing finger, severed while saving Sherman's life.

This scenario of a happily married couple unexpectedly having to offer hospitality to an inscrutable, potentially menacing outsider is scarcely novel, but many of the film's considerable pleasures come from the way in which expectations are constantly wrong-footed. Despite a climax that includes a brutal murder and the possibility of further bloodshed, Redford rarely turns up the volume. Indeed, the most explosive onscreen moment occurs when Sherman swears loudly in front of guests at a four-year-old's birthday party, one of many demonstrations of his difficulties adjusting to civilian life. His already acute identity crisis was exacerbated by a lengthy spell in military hospital, where he was wrongly registered as 'Oliver Sherman', and the film's opening shot voyeuristically invites us to spend half a minute staring at the livid scar almost bisecting the back of his head, emphasised by his military buzz cut. By contrast, Franklin has pointedly let his hair and beard grow.

Donal Logue's sad-eyed performance

anchors the film. His Franklin is a patently decent man, aware that fate's dice landed in his favour – the bullet that hit Sherman could just as easily have felled him. Even when at his most exasperated with his former comrade-in-arms he recognises this potential role-reversal – something that his wife Irene, through her stated refusal to dwell on her own past (never mind her husband's), can't appreciate. Molly Parker is given less to work with here, but even when Irene is at her most intransigent it's clear that she has her reasons too. Living in an isolated rural home, she understandably ranks the protection of her children well before any social niceties.

Rather too many films would have turned Sherman into a caricature psychopath – indeed, by the halfway mark many may feel that the narrative is heading straight for a familiar final-reel eruption. But the combination of Redford's nuanced script and the subtlety of Garret Dillahunt's title-role performance lead it in a quite different direction. His expression flickering between hurt confusion and sullen resignation, Sherman is a brain-damaged man who's desperately aware not only of his own affliction but also of the fact that it prevents him ever plausibly having the same kind of life as Franklin and Irene. His detailed survivalist anecdotes about killing foxes chime uneasily with a world that revolves around libraries, supermarkets and clean domestic spaces.

The film is equally well groomed. A killing that many films would have shown in gory close-up happens off screen after a discreet fade: the motive is more important than the mechanics. Instead, tension is maintained through quietly modulated conversations, their participants often in the centre of Antonio Calvache's incongruously wide frames. Redford and editor Matthew Hannam strip everything to essentials, omitting irrelevant cosmetic detail such as the precise conflict in which Franklin and Sherman fought. It's a low-key but oddly resonant little film that lingers in the mind long after its bleak yet psychologically inevitable conclusion.

◆◆ **Michael Brooke**



Fortunes of war: Garret Dillahunt

SYNOPSIS France, the 1760s. The musical Mozart family are touring the royal courts of Europe. Mother Anna and father Leopold are showing off 11-year-old violin prodigy Wolfgang Amadeus and his sister, 14-year-old singer and harpsichordist Maria Anna (nicknamed 'Nannerl'), whose precocious talent is seemingly the equal of her brother's though she receives little encouragement from their father.

A carriage breakdown waylays the family at the abbey of Fontevraud, where Nannerl befriends the cloistered Princess Louise Marie, daughter of Louis XV. Louise Marie charges Nannerl with delivering a letter to a suitor at Versailles; dressed in men's clothing to carry out her mission, Nannerl encounters the recently widowed Dauphin, who recruits her to compose music for him. Since Leopold refuses to teach Nannerl the craft, she takes to eavesdropping on Wolfgang's lessons. Before she's due to perform for French royalty, Nannerl reveals her deception to the Dauphin, who receives the news with equanimity and begins to flirt openly with her. The Mozarts continue their tour to London; Nannerl returns to Paris for rehearsals and, reverting to her male alter ego, takes lessons in composing at the Academy of Music, writing by candlelight to fulfil the Dauphin's commission.

Louise Marie, now wearing a novice's habit, informs Nannerl of the Dauphin's impending marriage to Maria Josepha of Saxony. Nannerl meets clandestinely with the Dauphin, who rejects her. Returning to her family, Nannerl feeds the scores she's composed into the fire.

CREDITS

Produced by
Paul Stephens
Eric Jordan
Written by
Ryan Redford
Based on the short story *Veterans* by Rachel Ingalls
Director of Photography
Antonio Calvache
Editor
Matthew Hannam
Production Designer
Oleg Savitski
Original Score
Benoit Charest
Sound Mixer
Bissa Sceik
Costume Designer
Lea Carlson

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Production Companies
Mongrel Media presents a Film Works production
Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada, Mongrel Media, Astral Media/The Harold Greenberg Fund, Ontario Media Development Corporation, Rogers Telefund, Ontario Tax Credit, Federal Tax Credit, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, Northern Ontario Media Fund

CAST

Garret Dillahunt
Sherman Oliver
Molly Parker
Irene Page
Donal Logue
Franklin Page
Kaelan Meunier
Jacob Page
Ava Corbeil
baby Page
Marc Strange
Raymond Saddler
Fiona Highet
Joan
Duane Murray
Glen

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Cinefile World

The Other Side of Sleep

Ireland/The Netherlands/
Hungary 2011

Director: Rebecca Daly
Certificate m s

Rebecca Daly's debut feature is bold in its sombre tones and spare address, but never quite lives up to the promise of its pregnantly suggestive opening image – a young woman, Arlene (Antonia Campbell-Hughes), waking up in the woods next to the murdered body of another woman, an uncanny nightmare with, it transpires, some overspill into actuality. Arlene is a complicated, troubled soul, prone to sleepwalking and insomnia and haunted still by the murder of her mother, whom she barely ever knew, way back when. The corpse in the woods turns out to be local woman Gina, but who killed her and why turns out to be less of a concern for Daly than tracing the effects of her death on her family and the small Irish community they inhabit, and more especially on Arlene, who is drawn to Gina's sister Donna and boyfriend Killen, and to the dead woman herself, as old wounds start to reopen.

Campbell-Hughes has to carry the film, appearing in virtually every scene, and does a fine job of lending her withdrawn, impassive character some subtle shading and warmth. Arlene's detached watchfulness and sleep deprivation set the mood, which though anchored in a vividly drawn small-town community seems frequently to sit on the fringes of a jittery dreamscape – an impression reinforced by the often nocturnal settings (shot very dark), nervily elliptical editing and, of course, that potent opening scene, picked up on later.

Relatively strong on atmosphere and texture, Daly's film is less surefooted in its script. Arlene's character feels too studied an accumulation of superficial, hand-me-down elements (putting on the victim's clothes and ringing her answerphone message, to name but two), her recessiveness an unwitting alibi for underexploration. And the film as a whole feels a little bit schizophrenic – neither a fully fledged character or community study, nor a suspenseful



Close your eyes: Antonia Campbell-Hughes

murder thriller, with which Daly flirts contrivedly – Arlene being watched in her flat by an unidentified man, her solitary, fearful walks home in the dark that seem to point to some deep-seated death wish, and most strikingly the wrong-footing lift in the car with Gina's spectral, catatonically griefstricken father (the best scene in the film). There's even a hint of the supernatural, figured most palpably by the woods that skirt the town, an eerily inexplicable image of two young girls facing towards them underlining the threat.

Like many another first-time director, Daly may have let ambition get slightly the better of her, chucking in every bright idea but not yet able to assimilate them into a convincing whole that develops each element effectively. In its calculated ambiguities and understatedness, the film strains for kinship with a particular mode of so-called arthouse cinema; and there are faint but intriguing echoes of Carine Adler's *Under the Skin* (1997), a more successful debut also trained on a disturbed heroine facing down her demons in the dark. **◆ Kieron Corless**

SYNOPSIS Offaly, Ireland, the present. A young woman, Arlene, sleeps in the woods next to the corpse of a murdered woman. On waking, she returns to her bedsit, washes her clothes and bedsheets, and heads to her factory job. The murder victim is discovered and identified as Gina, a young local woman. Arlene is afraid that someone is watching her flat, so much so that she barricades herself in at night. The killing has also stirred up thoughts of her own mother, who was murdered when Arlene was very young. Arlene takes flowers to Gina's memorial service, and subsequently befriends both Gina's sister Donna and her boyfriend Killen, to whom she's attracted. Killen is questioned by the police as a suspect, but later released. Arlene is given a lift home by Donna's father, and begins to fear that he might be the killer when they drive past her bedsit, until it becomes apparent that he is driving to Gina's flat to pick up clothes. Arlene later visits Gina's flat alone, puts on her underwear and calls her answerphone to hear her voice. The killer, an unknown man, is caught. Arlene and Killen kiss, interrupted when the latter starts to cry heavily. When Arlene returns home, she is upset to discover that she has pinned up newspaper images of the dead woman in her room, which she now takes down. She falls asleep. Donna tells her how much she misses her dead sister. Arlene goes for a walk in the countryside, her spirits seemingly slightly lifted.

CREDITS

Producers
Morgan Bushe
Macdara Kelleher
Written by
Rebecca Daly
Glenn Montgomery
Director of Photography
Suzie Lavelle
Editor
Halina Daugird
Production Designer
Eleanor Wood
Music & Sound Design
Michel Schöpping
Marc Lizier
Costume Designer
Andrea Flesch

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Production Companies
A Fastnet Films production in co-production with Rinkel Film BV, KMH Film
With the support of Cinéfondation - La Résidence
Supported by The Netherlands Film Fund, Motion Pictures Public Foundation of Hungary
With the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
Developed with the support of and produced with the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
With the support of investment incentives for the Irish film industry provided by the Government of Ireland
Filmed with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
Regional Support Fund

CAST

Antonia Campbell-Hughes
Arlene Kelly
Sam Keeley
Killen

Vicky Joyce
Donna
Olwen Fouéré
Maggie
Gina Moxley
Francie
Cathy Belton
Selina
Finian Robbins
Martin
Aaron Monaghan
Bill
Betty Brennan
Ita
Zsuzsa Varga
Gina
Arlene Kelly
Sandra
Louise Weir
Carol

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Fastnet Films

Payback Season

Director: Danny Donnelly
Certificate 15 91m 29s

When football and criminality mingle in a British film, it usually means that a story about hooliganism or the 'casuals' subculture is in the offing. *The Football Factory* (2004), *Green Street* (2005), *The Firm* (2009) – their names are legion, and even a gangster-movie/true-crime mash-up like *Rise of the Footsoldier* (2007) is narrated by a former hooligan. Small mercy then that *Payback Season* dares to tread a different path, albeit one familiar from many a *noir* – the reformed bad boy who finds his past returning to haunt him. Unfortunately, this doesn't make the debut feature of former dance-music impresario Danny Donnelly any less of a wretched effort.

The prolific Adam Deacon plays Jerome, an ambitious former gang member who has swapped a world of petty crime and drugs for wealth and fame as a Premier League wunderkind. With Jerome's luxury lifestyle proving a bone of contention and source of envy for his estranged former posse back on the estate, a chance encounter leads short-fused top dog Baron (David Ajala) to begin asking for hefty financial favours, which rapidly escalate into threatening demands: "If the payment stops, the football stops."

The gritty physical space of the estate notwithstanding, there's little in the film that's remotely convincing. Presumably, budgetary constraints require us to accept that Deacon is a highly coveted footballing prodigy without at any time seeing him in action on the pitch. This minor detail could perhaps be excused if it weren't for the weak script, one-dimensional characterisation and preponderance of tedious lads'-mag clichés. Ajala's menacing passive-aggressive performance is a highlight, but Donnelly pads out the running time with repetitive scenes of Baron making surprise appearances to offer Jerome grave warnings. By the umpteenth standoff, it's absurd instead of tense.

Other plot threads are featherweight: a blackmail attempt revolving around Jerome's romantic pursuit of a TV journalist (a wooden Nicola Burley) makes no discernible sense (and shoe-horns in a rather odd cameo by England World Cup hero Geoff Hurst



Kicking off: 'Payback Season'

as Jerome's agent), while a faintly promising strand touching on the dangerous appeal of gang life for Jerome's disaffected, jealous younger brother implodes when the character is unceremoniously forgotten about halfway through. The film's visuals are alternately drab and brashly gimmicky – take, for example, the super-slow-motion breakbeat-driven assault by Baron's gang on some defaulting payers, which suggests Zack Snyder gone kitchen sink.

Save for a curiously downbeat ending, *Payback Season* holds few surprises. More pointedly, given its premise – and the hand-wringing following last year's riots about the gulf between football's mega-rich players and the inner-city youth who view them as role models – it's devoid of comment. ➡ **Matthew Taylor**

CREDITS

Produced by
John Adams
Justin King
Written by
Danny Donnelly
Jenny Fitzpatrick
Director of Photography
James Martin
Editor
Oliver Parker
Production Designer
Paul Burns
Score
Jason Kaye
Nayla 'Silkey' Largie
Sound Mixer
Nigel Albermariche
Costume Designer
Alex Watherston

©[TBC]
Production Companies
Pure Film Productions in association with Angry Badger Pictures presents a Danny Donnelly film

CAST

Adam Deacon
Jerome Davies
Nicola Burley
Lisa
David Ajala
Baron
Leo Gregory
Andy
Anna Popplewell
Izzie
Sir Geoff Hurst
Adam Avely
DJ Spoony
himself
Bronson Webb
Brooksy
Billy Seymour
Social
Nina Young
Sandra
Liam Donnelly
Aaron Davies

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

8,233 ft +8 frames

The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!

USA/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Peter Lord
Certificate U 87m 57s

Stop-motion animation, hand-crafted by film artists to be palpably material and intriguingly textured, appeals strongly to our sense of touch. Even in Aardman Animations' lavish, hectic and immaculately finished pirate adventure, one's desire to fossick around in the elaborate sets or handle the exquisitely detailed characters is oddly powerful. *The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!* is the most ambitious of the studio's stop-motion productions to date (it took 18 months to shoot and involved 340 character models and 220,000 props) but its appeal is as fiercely tactile as that of its predecessors. Where this cheerful tale of a pirate captain who longs to be Pirate of the Year differs noticeably is in replacing the much-loved Wallace & Gromit-style domestic whimsy with a jaunty and equally English absurdity.

Adapted by Gideon Defoe from his own Pythonesque comic novel, the film has an irrepressibly bouncy aspect, zipping through its droll, episodic narrative at speed. Its plot cutely joins the historical and the absurd when the crew capture Charles Darwin, who spots that the ship's parrot Polly is the last remaining dodo and persuades the captain that presenting it in London will make his fortune. More wearingly, it performs exactly the same trick in casting Queen Victoria as a villainous, pirate-hating virago who won't rest till she's bagged Polly as *dodo à l'orange* for her rare-animal dining club. But

unlike the more fully realised *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit* (2005), the film has a restless pace and thin characterisation, so that the pirates' scientific triumph at the Royal Society, or their frantic attempt to spring Polly from the queen's impregnable steamship, works as jovial fun and little else.

Hugh Grant's voice-work pitches his bluff, luxuriously bearded Pirate Captain as an engaging cross between Errol Flynn and a kindly school prefect. However, since the other pirates are just quirky ciphers (Martin Freeman and Brendan Gleeson are frankly wasted as 'Pirate with scarf' and 'Pirate with gout'), there's little of the emotional interplay between characters that pushed *Chicken Run* (2000) beyond clever pastiche. Only David Tennant's weaselly Darwin, consumed with ambition and guilty lust for Imelda Staunton's shrill Queen Victoria, makes his mark. Defoe's script is imaginative – there's a neat sequence where the captain falls successively foul of a plague ship, a ghost vessel, a naturist outing and a geography field trip. Still, it coasts on affable schoolboy humour ("By sweet Neptune's briny pants!") rather than crafting memorable gags.

Yet visually the film is a joy, adroitly filling out its rich stop-motion world with judicious CG embellishments, such as the vast whale that whumps through a tavern wall spouting a tidal wave of doubloons. The character design is unfailingly lively and original, particularly in the case of Mr Bobo, Darwin's 'manpanzee butler', who communicates in a stream of elegant flashcards. Director Peter Lord and co-director Jeff Newitt bring characteristic Aardman energy and ingenuity to the big set pieces, such as a wild, slaloming bathtub chase down a steep staircase and the whirling finale pitting Queen Victoria's ninja fighting skills against pirate pluck. The now-ubiquitous 3D ➡



Beard's eye view: 'The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!'

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Jerome Davies has turned his back on the gang culture of the estate where he grew up, and achieved wealth and fame as a Premier League footballer. While visiting his family on the estate, Jerome is accosted by his former protector, gang leader Baron, who asks him for money. Jerome reluctantly acquiesces, only for Baron to request more when a drug deal collapses. Baron and his cronies involve Jerome's younger brother Aaron in a violent raid on some rivals. When Jerome asks Baron to keep his distance, Baron demands more cash. Baron terrorises the other gang members with his increasingly psychopathic behaviour. Jerome romances TV journalist Lisa. A boy from the estate photographs the couple, and threatens to reveal Jerome's past to a tabloid. Jerome's agent pays off the youth to keep him quiet. Baron threatens Jerome with violence and the destruction of his career unless the payments continue. Jerome's coach Andy warns Baron to leave Jerome alone. Later, Andy is left hospitalised after being stabbed by Baron. Jerome confronts Baron, who stabs him in the legs. Intending to kill Jerome, Baron is shot dead by one of his own crew.

also serves a real purpose, immersing audiences in the handsome detail of the sets, and positively encouraging repeat screenings to search out hidden gags. But ebullient playfulness and virtuoso image-making aren't enough on their own; if only the film could have raised its narrative game – and its wit – to match. **♥♥ Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Co-Director

Jeff Newitt

Produced by

Julie Lockhart

Peter Lord

David Sproston

Screenplay

Gideon Defoe

Based upon his book

Director of

Photography

Frank Passingham

Edited by

Justin Krish

Production Designer

Norman Garwood

Music

Theodore Shapiro

Supervising Sound

Editor

Adrian Rhodes

Senior Animation

Supervisor

Jay Grace

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Animation Inc

Production

Companies

Columbia Pictures and

Sony Pictures

Animation present an

Aardman Production

Executive Producer

Carla Shelley

VOICE CAST

Hugh Grant

the pirate captain

Martin Freeman

the pirate with a scarf

Imelda Staunton

Queen Victoria

David Tennant

Charles Darwin

Jeremy Piven

Black Bellamy

Salma Hayek

Cutlass Liz

Lenny Henry

Peg-Leg Hastings

Brian Blessed

the pirate king

Russell Tovey

the albino pirate

Brendan Gleeson

the pirate with gout

Ashley Jensen

the surprisingly

curvaceous pirate

Ben Whitehead

the pirate who likes

sunsets and kittens

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Sony Pictures Releasing

7,915 ft +8 frames

US theatrical title

The Pirates! Band of

Misfits



Party piece: 'Project X'

Project X

USA 2012

Director: Nima Nourizadeh

Certificate 18 87m 45s

Like a desert Joshua tree sprouting another contorted branch, with Nima Nourizadeh's *Project X* the southern Californian debauching-teens narrative grows a new dark bloom. The genealogy of this story of a suburban house party getting really, really out of control takes in 1980s when-the-cat's-away comedies *Risky Business* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, the abject moral freefall documented in Bret Easton Ellis's novels, and gross-out high-school/fratboy farces from *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978) to *American Pie* (1999). The smack of novelty comes (in part) from the film being entirely comprised of handheld, pseudo-found footage, which is both an of-the-moment trend that threatens to go stale and an exhilaratingly immediate visual strategy for putting us among the heaving bodies and spilled tequila as the roof is blown off.

Nourizadeh's film makes little effort to stay within the bounds of its self-imposed formal logic. An opening title thanks the people who turned in their footage of the cataclysmic shindig, though we rarely see anyone filming events on their mobile phones or camcorders. The chief videographer is Dax, a rather seedy, unseen figure who would have to be in two or three or four places at once if the resulting footage is

SYNOPSIS California, the present. The film consists of footage supposedly taken by guests at a house party.

Thomas's parents leave him in charge of their suburban house for the weekend, making him promise not to abuse their trust. However, with friends Costa and JB he plans a party, which the three hope will make them irresistible to the girls at school.

While scoring drugs for the party, the friends steal a gnome from their dealer's house; it is later found to conceal a stash of ecstasy. Unbeknown to Thomas, Costa has advertised the event on the internet, and as the party gets under way the number of guests begins to escalate. Thomas fields phone calls from his father, and manages to keep suspicion at bay. He enjoys a clinch with his friend Kirby, but she later walks in on him making love to rival beauty Alexis. The party starts to get out of hand: serious damage is done to the house, and Thomas's father's sports car ends up in the swimming pool. As hundreds of guests party wildly in the street and garden, the friends' drug dealer turns up looking for his gnome and turns a flame-thrower on the house. Riot police arrive.

The next morning, Thomas's father informs his son that his college fund will be used to pay for repairs. At school Thomas is given a hero's welcome; Kirby forgives his infidelity.

to be believed. More unnervingly, his only motivation for putting his camera this way rather than that – down this cleavage, round that half-closed bedroom door – would seem to be a disturbingly unchecked scopophilia. Pity the partygoers who check any videos uploaded to Facebook and find out that the nice boy with the camera might as well have been Mark Lewis, the murderous protagonist of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960).

The vogue for found footage has so far been mostly taken up in horror cinema, from *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) to *Cloverfield* (2008), but *Project X*, it should be stressed, is only a teen film, an amped-up version of the hedonism-spiralling-out-of-control formula familiar from producer Todd Phillips's smash hit *The Hangover* (2009). It's never clear how conscious Nourizadeh is of the ley lines of disquiet and moral entropy that course beneath this film. The music-video veteran (he has worked for Hot Chip and Franz Ferdinand among others) may have set out merely to update *Risky Business* for the YouTube generation, and blundered obliviously upon a Boschian vision of hell on earth.

For although the trappings are modern – daddy's sports car, the backyard pools and cavernous houses that are de rigueur for the misbehaving-kids film – this is Pasadena reimaged as a City of the Plain. It disturbs not for its excess – in any case, depictions of copious drug-taking, sex and nudity are hardly touch-papers for moral panic these days – but for its loathsome view

of people, its leering mean-spiritedness, and especially for its quite breathtaking misogyny. One of the three boys hosting the party gives his lascivious mates a lesson in 'finger-banging'; another puts up a 'Naked Girls Only' sign by the swimming pool; a Yorkshire terrier humps a dog twice its size before doing the same to the open mouth of an unconscious reveller – none of these would be too out of place in a seedier cut of *American Pie*. Why then does the experience of watching Nourizadeh's film feel closer to *Salò* (1975)?

That a lot of this is apparently being filmed by a maladjusted pervert (an end title blithely tells us that Dax is later found to have done away with his parents) can hardly account for the sour vision of a society self-combusting. As the party dissolves into mayhem and violence, the picture of a have-it-all class turning to anarchy without a cause, as if solely to feel its own dangerous energy, seems at once contemporary and Ballardian. Pull up a ringside seat, the film seems to offer, Rome is burning.

♥♥ Sam Wigley

CREDITS

Produced by

Todd Phillips

Screenplay

Matt Drake

Michael Bacall

Story

Michael Bacall

Director of

Photography

Ken Seng

Edited by

Jeff Groth

Production Designer

Bill Brzeski

Sound Mixer

Coleman Metts

Costumes

Designed by

Alison McCosh

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Entertainment Inc.

Production

Companies

A Warner Bros. Pictures

presentation

A Silver Pictures

production

A Green Hat Films

production

Executive Producers

Joel Silver

Scott Budnick

Andrew Rona

Alex Heinemann

Marty P. Ewing

CAST

Thomas Mann

Thomas

Oliver Cooper

Costa

Jonathan Daniel

Brown

JB

Dax Flame

Dax

Kirby Bliss Banton

Kirby

Brandy Hender

Everett

Nick Nervies

Tyler

Alexis Knapp

Alexis

Miles Teller

Miles

Peter Mackenzie

dad

Caitlin Dulany

mom

Rob Evors

Rob

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

Prints by

Technicolor

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros

Distributors (UK)

7,897 ft +8 frames

The Raven

USA/Spain 2012

Director: James McTeigue

Certificate 15 110m 52s

Nobody knows the cause of 19th-century gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe's death, nor why he disappeared for several days prior to it, but many a fictional work has been generated by the endless speculation. *The Raven*, directed by James McTeigue (*V for Vendetta*), follows suit by way of a plodding thriller that imagines Poe (John Cusack) during the last days of his life helping Baltimore detective Emmett Fields (Luke Evans) to solve a series of murders bearing more than a passing resemblance to the killings in Poe's published stories. When Emily, Poe's fiancée, is kidnapped and buried alive, the killer's final trick will be to try to outsmart Poe himself – the writer will have to save Emily by following clues from his own works, at the same time writing the outcome as his final story. So the writer becomes the victim of one of his own grim tales – an inviting premise for any Poe fan, but unfortunately one that the generally dull script and mistimed direction fail to capitalise on.

Ben Livingston and Hannah Shakespeare focus their script on some of the writer's darkest and most macabre works, such as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Pit and the Pendulum*, highlighting particularly their gory deaths. The outcome is an abiding impression that the complexity and innovation of Poe's writing have been ignored in favour of their shock value and CGI compatibility.

The plot shies away from any analysis of this most mysterious figure, preferring instead a ponderous by-the-numbers rescue mission that



In a flap: Luke Evans

unsuccessfully reimagines Poe as an action hero rather than the detective figure he arguably originated in his stories. Despite his best efforts, John Cusack (a declared fan of the writer) cannot shake off his trademark laidback demeanour, and the spells of longwinded verbosity soon become a hindrance, slowing down the pace of what essentially is a straightforward thriller – albeit with little sense of direction, tension or suspense. In terms of dialogue, Poe's sharp ironies are transmuted into cocksure mockery far too modern to be convincing in this setting; two running jokes in particular – Poe's pet raccoon and his drink habit – are overused and clownish.

Inspid, tedious and bafflingly soulless, *The Raven* fails to conjure any of the lyricism, the morbid desperation or the sheer wit contained in any given line of Poe's work. Instead, it is all smoke and mirrors, like a second-rate magician who can't be bothered to pull a trick.

♦♦ Mar Diestro-Dópido

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen

United Kingdom/France 2011

Director: Lasse Hallström

Certificate 12A 106m 58s

Disregarding the raunch that has recently overtaken the romcom, the measured, amiably middlebrow *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* reintroduces more than a little restraint into the genre. Screenwriter Simon Beaufoy gives an understated English reticence to this gentle tale of an uptight fisheries expert dropped into a workplace romance via a sheikh's unlikely scheme to create a salmon-fishing lake in the Yemen. Indeed, it's so charmingly old-school that the hero and heroine address one another as "Dr Jones" and "Ms Chetwode-Talbot" for much of the film.

To carve out enough space for this decorous, slowly unfurling affair, Beaufoy and director Lasse Hallström have pared back the political satire and jettisoned the black comedy that characterised Paul Torday's original epistolary novel. What emerges is the kind of glossy, good-natured and above

all feelgood literary adaptation that Hallström has specialised in since *The Cider House Rules* (1999) and *Chocolat* (2000). This geniality works well enough for the film's first half, which takes its time setting up Dr Fred Jones's principled reluctance to participate in "a wealthy man's bagatelle", and his slow-growing closeness with Sheikh Muhammed's London fixer, the fragrant Harriet Chetwode-Talbot. But it isn't equal to dealing with the darker, more dramatic questions of militantly religious Yemeni opposition to the scheme that are raised later on, when there's an assassination attempt and an armed attack on the sheikh's new dam. These crises, and the raw grief as Harriet's soldier beau goes missing in Afghanistan, feel narratively brave but faintly incongruous. They erupt unsteadily into what is otherwise a pleasantly lightweight comic plot, replete with fun facts about fishing and mild swipes at British government bureaucracy and the post-Blair political culture of spin and expediency ("We need a 'good news' story from the Middle East. Get on with it").

Pacing is the film's other problem, as the plot dawdles shamelessly while pressing home its central metaphor of Fred 'going against the stream' of his stagnant life and stalled marriage, as his farmed salmon must learn to do in the



Shallow waters: Amr Waked, Ewan McGregor

CREDITS

Producers

Marc D. Evans
Trevor Macy
Aaron Ryder
Written by
Hannah Shakespeare
Ben Livingston

Director of Photography

Danny Ruhlmann

Editor

Niven Howie

Production Designer

Roger Ford

Music Composed and Conducted by

Lucas Vidal

Sound Mixer

John Rodda

Costume Designer

Carlo Poggioni

©Montillado
Productions, LLC/Poe
Producciones, SLU

Production Companies

Intrepid Pictures
presents in association
with Galavis Film an
Intrepid Pictures.
FilmNation production
Produced in association
with Endgame
Entertainment

Executive Producers

Jesús Martínez Asenzio

CAST

John Cusack

Edgar Allan Poe

Luke Evans

Detective Fields

Alice Eve

Emily Hamilton

Brendan Gleeson

Captain Hamilton

Kevin McNally

Maddux

Oliver Jackson-Cohen

John Cantrell

Jimmy Yuill

Captain Elderidge

Sam Hazeldine

Ivan

Pam Ferris

Mrs Bradley

Brendan Coyle

Reagan

Adrian Rawlins

Doc Clements

Dolby Digital/DTS/

SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International UK & Eire

9,978 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Baltimore, 1849. Detective Emmett Fields is investigating a series of murders in the city. They are suspiciously reminiscent of the published work of struggling, heavy-drinking writer Edgar Allan Poe, so the police seek his help. The killer leaves a message on one of his next victims – he will kidnap Emily, the daughter of Colonel Hamilton. Poe is courting Emily – in secret, since her father does not approve of him. Outwitting the police and Poe, the killer succeeds in kidnapping Emily at her birthday ball, and buries her alive. In order to save her, Poe must write a story in which he solves the mystery and decides both his own and Emily's destiny. Unable to find Emily after several failed attempts, Poe decides that he will offer himself to the killer as a substitute, and writes as much. It transpires that the killer is typesetter Ivan, a fan of the writer's work. Ivan accepts Poe's offer. Poe swallows poison and frees Emily. He then goes to a park and sits on a bench, hallucinating. His last word before dying is "Reynolds" – the name assumed by Ivan to travel to France incognito. When Ivan arrives, Fields is waiting for him.

SYNOPSIS London, present day. Repressed government fisheries scientist Fred Jones is appalled to be drafted into a wealthy sheikh's near-impossible project to build a salmon-fishing lake in the Yemen. He finds himself attracted to Harriet, the sheikh's London representative, whose soldier boyfriend Robert leaves to fight in Afghanistan. Sheikh Muhammed convinces Fred of the ecological and economic benefits of the scheme. Fred's marriage falters, Robert is reported missing, and Fred and Harriet grow close. While Fred is on a trip to Yemen, a local religious fundamentalist denounces the project. Fred saves Sheikh Muhammed's life when a Yemeni assassin tries to shoot him. Harriet learns of Robert's death. She starts a tentative romance with Fred. The British prime minister's ruthless press secretary Patricia discovers that Robert has been found alive. She stages a reunion between Robert and Harriet at the press opening of the salmon-fishing lake. Yemeni activists hijack the new dam and flood the lake with a wall of water, nearly killing Fred and Sheikh Muhammed. Robert, realising that Harriet loves Fred, sets her free. Fred resolves to restart the project with local involvement; he and Harriet are reunited.

Yemen. Ewan McGregor and Emily Blunt do indeed play nicely together as the fussy scientist and the grieving Sloane Ranger brought together by fish and fate. Yet their understated dialogue and low-key exchanges are regularly upstaged by Kristin Scott Thomas's Mrs Maxwell, an ebulliently bullying Downing Street press adviser whose rude and relentless news management gives her an enviable energy and most of the zingers. Rather more subtly, the excellent Conleth Hill is a study in hilarious, sullen indolence as Fred's buck-passing boss.

When it strays beyond convivial courting and spoofing, however, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* gets out of its depth. Despite its keenness to avoid Orientalist stereotyping of Sheikh Muhammed (a courtly Amr Waked), he's little more than a glamorous eastern source of cod philosophy – in every sense – about “the peaceful egalitarianism of fishing”. Given the current real-life political upheavals in the country, the film's portrait of a western Yemen dotted with picturesque villages and pesky militants appears a gauche combination of travelogue and topicality. Like the terrorism-and-flooding melodrama of the film's finale it feels both effortful and extraneous, since it's ultimately Blunt and McGregor's polite but playful onscreen chemistry that reels us in.

◆◆ **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by Paul Webster
Written by Simon Beaufoy
Based on the novel by Paul Torday
Director of Photography Terry Stacey
Editor Lisa Gunning
Production Designer Michael Carlin
Original Music Dario Marianelli
Production Sound Mixer Peter Lindsay
Costume Designer Julian Day

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Production Company BBC Films, Lionsgate UK and the UK Film Council present a Kudos Pictures production in association with Davis Films Productions
A Lasse Hallström film
Made with the support of the UK Film Council's Premiere and Development Funds
Developed in association with BBC Films
Executive Producers Jamie Laurenson
Paula Jalfon
Zygi Kamasa
Guy Avshalom
Stephen Garrett

CAST

Ewan McGregor
Dr Alfred 'Fred' Jones
Emily Blunt
Harriet Chetwode-Talbot
Kristin Scott Thomas
Patricia Maxwell
Amr Waked
Sheikh Muhammed
Tom Mison
Captain Robert Mayers
Rachael Stirling
Mary Jones

Conleth Hill
Bernard Sugden
Catherine Steadman
Ashley
Tom Beard
Peter Maxwell
Jill Baker
Betty
Alex Taylor-McDowall
Edward Maxwell
Matilda White
Abby Maxwell
Otto Farrant
Joshua Maxwell

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

9.627 ft +0 frames

Silent House

Directors: Chris Kentis, Laura Lau
Certificate 15 **85m** **26s**

A quick remake of Gustavo Hernández's critically acclaimed ultra-low-budget Uruguayan chiller *La casa muda* (2010), this creepy-house tale revamps the plot but borrows its predecessor's big gimmick – it appears to be shot in real time and in a single take. Watched critically, it's not hard to spot the cut-friendly places where the camera zooms into blurry murk. But that doesn't get in the way of the claustrophobic atmosphere and relentless pace created by this unblinking point of view.

The camera's eye is fixed on Elizabeth Olsen as Sarah, a moody teenager who has come with her father and uncle to the old family summerhouse by the sea. The place has been trashed by squatters and is boarded up; with no power and no daylight, they must take battery lanterns everywhere they go as they work to get the house ready to sell. The gloom, mould and air of decay make this the perfect place for Bad Stuff to happen, which it duly does: when Uncle Peter (Eric Sheffer Stevens) goes out and dad John (Adam Trese) disappears while investigating a strange noise upstairs, Sarah realises that there's something nasty going on in the house – and she's locked inside.

Last seen embodying wide-eyed vulnerability in Sean Durkin's *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, Olsen also does gibbering terror terribly well, and like Durkin, directors Kris Kentis and Laura Lau recognise her open, doll-like face as perfect visual shorthand for easily predated innocence. Kentis and Lau's previous film, *Open Water* (2003), was all about remorselessly ratcheting up the tension as we wait for the monster to surface, and they pull off the same trick here. The big difference is that, while the circling camera in the earlier film came to suggest the sharks that we all knew were on their way, here the camera's role is more ambiguous. At times it stays close to Sarah and offers us her point of view; at others it seems to stalk her menacingly or leer at her greedily. The film opens with an impressive tracking shot that begins smoothly overhead as Sarah clambers along the rocky shore, and then moves alongside her to follow her to the house. By the time we've moved indoors, it's as shaky as the handheld camcorder of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), lurching in and out of focus and skidding nauseously from face to face. But once Sarah settles into the rhythm of her hide/run/hide routine, the camera quietsens and seems to become the knowing collaborator; like Sarah, it's at the mercy of darkness. In one bravura sequence, Sarah's only source of light is a Polaroid flashbulb, which she fires desperately into the dark, stripping the camera's involvement back to the level of snapshot.

And it's at around this point that we begin to wonder what exactly is going on. Long after we've comfortably recognised that something's not right in the house, we start to see that actually,

everything is wrong. For one thing the film can't seem to decide whether Sarah's on the run from a psycho stalker or a supernatural entity. Halfway through, it even looks as if she's home and dry, but then she's plunged back into the nightmare again. By the time you reach the end of the film you realise that this sense of unease was part of the plan all along, and if you're expecting a well-drilled horror flick this will be very annoying. But if you don't mind a quirky twist, there's a lot to like here. ◆◆ **Lisa Mullen**

CREDITS

Produced by Agnes Mentre
Laura Lau
Written by Laura Lau
Director of Photography Igor Martinovic
Production Designer Roshelle Berliner
Music Nathan Larson
Supervising Sound Designer and Editor Glenn T. Morgan
Costume Designer Lynn Falconer

©[TBC]
Production Companies LD Entertainment, Open Road Films and Elle Driver present in association with Silverwood Films an Elle Driver, Eye for an Eye Filmworks, Tazora Films production
A Chris Kentis/Laura Lau film
Executive Producers Adeline Fontan Tessaur
Eva Diederix
George Paaswell
Lynette Howell
Mickey Liddell
Jennifer Hilton Monroe
Danny Perkins

SYNOPSIS

US, present day. Teenager Sarah is helping her father and uncle to pack up and repair the family seaside summerhouse. The electricity is off and the windows and doors are boarded up, so they have to light their way with lanterns as they move around. A girl, Sophia, comes to visit Sarah, claiming to be an old playmate; she arranges to return later, but then Sarah and her father are left alone. Sarah hears footsteps and thinks she sees an intruder; discovering her father lying on the floor unconscious, she tries to escape from the locked house. But when she does get out, she runs into her uncle, who takes her back to the house to rescue her father.

This time the intruder is joined by a ghostly girl, who is apparently being abused; blood starts to appear in strange places. Sarah's uncle is knocked out and she again flees, but this time she sees Sophia, who turns out to be a spectral reminder of a buried secret: Sarah was sexually abused in this house and has repressed the memory; without knowing it she has been terrorising her father in revenge. Sarah kills her father, wounds her uncle, and walks out of the house into freedom.

Town of Runners

United Kingdom/
USA/Hong Kong 2011
Director: Jerry Rothwell

Jerry Rothwell's documentary doesn't seek to explain exactly why the small Ethiopian farming town of Bekoji has produced such startling numbers of champion distance runners (among them Tirunesh Dibaba, Kenenisa Bekele and Derartu Tulu) – we're left to surmise that rigorous discipline conspires with a genetic predisposition for endurance honed by high-altitude training. Instead of theorising about the source of their talents, Rothwell gets up close with a group of young runners, as they confront the vagaries of fate and fortune that affect their chances of international recognition. The resulting document emphasises both the universality of certain elements of small-town teenage experience – the desire to escape, the frustration of financial limitations, parents who smother you or shrug you off – and the specificity of growing up in Africa, where ambition must do continual battle with economic and infrastructural disadvantages.

American movie mantras about following one's dreams and being true to one's self don't come to the rescue of gifted 15-year-old Hawii when the athletics club that takes her on fails to provide adequate food or shelter. Her health suffers and her performance on the track declines. “I always believed you could achieve your dreams through hard work,” notes Hawii's friend and fellow runner Betty, from their utterly dilapidated clubhouse. “Unless they believe in us, our dreams won't take us anywhere.” Betty's anger isn't quite followed up by the film, which interviews one shifty chap from the Woliso Sports Office about his inadequate government budget, but doesn't further pursue those who've left the young athletes in limbo (and danger). The film's closing quote, from American runner Ed Moses – “When I was in school I used to lose a lot, but I didn't see it as losing. I saw it as preparing” – is bittersweet in the context of Hawii's experience. Are Moses's words intended to make the point that all athletes, American or African, must face up to disappointment in order to succeed? That Hawii should be able to face down her disadvantages with sheer force of will? Or that Africans might as well prepare themselves early on for lives that will see disproportionate loss?

Rothwell, also cinematographer on the film, permits such ambiguities to stand, favouring atmospheric and gorgeously lit tableaux of village life and running practice over full exploration of the issues raised. This makes for a work that's lusciously shot, touchingly intimate and never didactic, but that suffers somewhat from a lack of focus. The framing device of a narration by schoolboy observer Biruk comes off as a touch artificial – an attempt to

impose more narrative on a story arc that lacks obvious drama. We're left to question for ourselves whether Hawii's potential has been squandered because of Africa's wider social problems, or has simply faltered due to ill luck or a lack of physical tenacity on her part. And perhaps that's the point – random factors and human error combine with vaster forces to shape every destiny – but the effect is somewhat unsatisfying. The source of Bekoji's over-representation in athletics, and the future of its efforts in that area, are as obscure by the close of the film as they were at the start. **◆ Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Producer

Dan Demissie
Al Morrow

Edited by

Jerry Rothwell

Editor

Alan Mackay

Composer

Vincent Watts

Sound Designer

Vincent Watts

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Production Companies

Met Film presents an

ITVS International co-

production

A Klikk co-production

In association with

Britdoc and Channel 4

Supported with

development funding

from WorldView

With the support of the

MEDIA Programme of

the European Union

In association with

Radio Television Hong

Kong

Supported by a grant

from the Sundance

Institute Documentary

Film Program with

additional support from

the Sundance

Institute/ESPN Films

Award

Executive Producers

Kristin Olafsdóttir

Jonny Persey

for ITVS:

Sally Jo Fifer

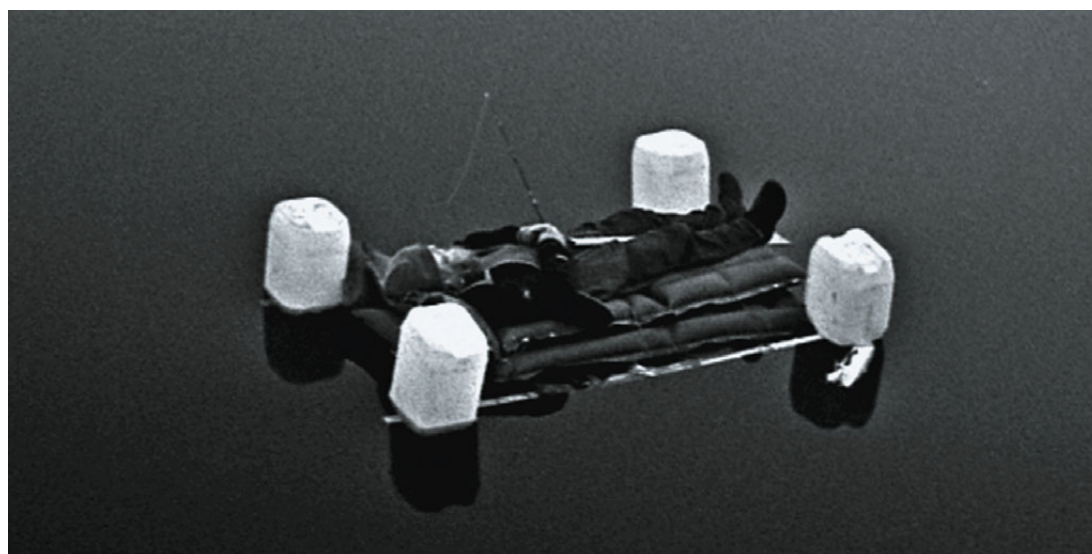
In Colour

[1.85:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Dogwoof



Nature buoy: Jake Williams

Two Years at Sea

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Ben Rivers

Over the past few years, British artist/filmmaker Ben Rivers has become a prominent exponent of a type of cinema that literally deserves the epithet 'handmade'. He works with 16mm film, shooting largely with a hand-cranked Bolex camera, and tends to process his footage in his kitchen sink. Not surprisingly, this yields results that you might call 'alchemical'. I mean this both in terms of the mineral transformations recorded in the film stock (flaws of exposure, flickers, odd bubble effects embedded in the image) but also in terms of their vision: there is a sense of arcane phenomena being brought to light, as if in a séance-like process. His work is above all transformative: visits to various islands around the globe resulted in 2010's *Slow Action*, which turns straightforward documentary footage into a collection of quasi-futuristic fictions about apocryphal worlds.

In some respects, *Two Years at Sea* is Rivers's most conventional work – although that is a strictly relative term. More measured than his rougher, free-associative shorts, it is a contemplative portrait of hermit Jake Williams, who lives in a forest on the edge of the Cairngorms, and who was previously seen in *This Is My Land* (14 minutes, 2006). *Two Years at Sea* sets out to record – or rather, to inhabit – Williams's world. His world, that is, rather than his head – for the film captures the rituals and textures of his habitat and lifestyle without claiming to take us into his mind.

At moments, the camera looks long and hard at Williams's weathered face and records an impassive gaze, which may be deep thought or absent reverie – but which is never directed back at the camera. Intermittently, Williams sifts through photographs seen in close-up (two small girls, a woman, a man stone-

walling), which might be pictures from his own past, although it is a past we never have access to. He never speaks – only a muttered "Chesty cough" as he unearths a medicine bottle. Other sounds do the talking for him, providing a sketch of his humours and imagination: music including various Indian recordings and a wheezy rendition of a ribald, bloodthirsty English folk ballad.

Otherwise, the Tolstoy-bearded Williams proves himself so intimately a creature of the forest that we could be discovering a long-lost human cousin of Dr Seuss's Lorax. The film's strangest section sees him asleep amid foliage before a caravan is mysteriously, through invisible means, hoisted up in the treetops. Williams awakes on high and surveys the treescape before him, in unflappable wonder. Is this a dream, or a realistic recording of one of the tasks that Rivers has set his subject for this project? It's certainly a moment of sublimely economical wonder.

Rivers enjoys seemingly unlimited access to Williams's world – filming him at various activities that could generally fit under the heading 'pottering about', often sifting through the clutter he has amassed around himself. We also see him drive through the countryside, take a shower in his cramped kitchen, and work on plans and blueprints (Rivers's hermits and loners are often highly skilled, fired with a technological sense of purpose).

Another sequence shows Williams trekking across a windblown, inhospitable landscape carrying four plastic canisters and a frame, which he assembles into a boat with a lilo as its surface. He floats off on a small body of water and is carried away on gentle ripples to its edge – then slowly floats back. This near-silent extended sequence stands as metonym for the film's title – an enclosed, quasi-oceanic reverie at the heart of this picture of a landlocked existence. (The film offers no other explanation of the title – though Rivers's press notes refer to Williams having once spent two years at sea in order to realise "the radical dream he had as a younger man").

The ascetic yet joyous sparseness of

Two Years at Sea stands in the context of the UK film-release schedule as that patch of water does to the density of the forest – it provides an oasis of calm, lucid vision. Rivers's grainy black-and-white Scope photography provides, in its no-budget simplicity, a stark beauty that recalls the plains sequences of Béla Tarr's cinema. *Two Years at Sea* is an entirely distinctive variation on a strand of British ruralism that has come into its own of late, a worthy pendant to Gideon Koppel's *sleep furiously* (2007) and the Andrew Kötting repertoire – not to mention Philip Trevelyan's *The Moon and the Sledgehammer* (1971), a much treasured text of British docu-ruralism.

But Rivers's film takes us to a place entirely its own. At moments we feel we're getting to the very heart of that place; at others, it remains tantalisingly unknowable, as in the mesmerising final eight-minute shot that studies Williams's gently opaque features as he gazes into a fire. At moments like this, Rivers brings us as close as he can possibly get to Williams's psychic landscape – yet we know we're only seeing its outskirts.

◆ Jonathan Romney

CREDITS

Film by

Ben Rivers

Produced by

Ben Rivers

Sound

Chu-Li Shewing

©Ben Rivers

Production Companies

Commissioned by

FLAMIN Productions

through Film London

Artists' Moving Image

Network with funding

from Arts Council

England

WITH

Jake Williams

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Soda Pictures

SYNOPSIS A documentary portrait of Jake Williams, who lives in isolation in a thickly forested part of Aberdeenshire. Williams is seen in his habitat at different times of year. In what might be a dream sequence, his caravan floats aloft into the treetops. Later he builds a makeshift boat and drifts on a stretch of water.

Wanderlust

USA/Japan 2012

Director: David Wain

Certificate 15 98m 4s

Role Models director David Wain reunites with actor Paul Rudd for this lighthearted exploration of the pleasures and pitfalls of communal living. The story begins in recession-blighted Manhattan, where husband and wife George (Rudd) and Linda (Jennifer Aniston) have come to accept the city's demands to a comical degree: George thinks nothing of being hit by a car, and the couple try to convince themselves that their 'microloft', as the realtor brands it, is huge. But rendered jobless and homeless, they're forced to leave the city. Their choices: life with George's obnoxious, materialistic brother Rick, or an unexpected offer from Elysium, a self-sufficient commune. Elysium it is.

The characters at Elysium are seemingly happy, pot-smoking hippies who share everything, including beds. While initially stereotypical, key characters begin to peel back the layers, including commune leader Seth (Justin Theroux). An expert farmer, guitarist and charmer, Seth's superior rants against fax machines and video players reveal both his backstory and misplaced arrogance in a comical fashion. Linda's attraction to this resident alpha male is understandable but, as his passive-aggressive tendencies come to the fore, we're in no doubt that George is the better man.

While the characters in Elysium amuse through a mixture of innocence, idealism and surreal behaviour, those outside the community make dark and unwittingly tragic asides. When we first meet Rick's wife Marissa (Michaela Watkins), she casually admits that her smile is an attempt to trick her body into thinking she's happy. Later, Marissa tries to justify bringing cocktail hour forward, further exposing her boredom and unhappiness in a world of empty wealth. Meanwhile George and Linda strike a balance as the loving but world-weary couple drawn to the possibility of escape from the pressures of city life. Rudd's gift for physical comedy is used well on several occasions, although an improvised seduction scene strikes a crude note, as do the predictable toilet gags and a scene featuring placenta. Such humour is no surprise from a comedy produced by Judd Apatow (*Superbad*, *Bridesmaids*) but it jars with the film's more mature themes.

Still, amusing dialogue and performances make *Wanderlust* an agreeable watch despite its



Paul Rudd, Jennifer Aniston

straightforward plot. And while it may not be Apatow or Rudd's finest work, it's arguably the best film Aniston has made in years.

◆ Anna Smith

CREDITS

Produced by
Judd Apatow
Ken Marino
Paul Rudd
David Wain
Written by
Ken Marino
David Wain
Director of Photography
Michael Bonvillian
Editor
David Moritz
Robert Nassau
Production Designer
Aaron Osborne
Music
Craig Wedren
Production Sound Mixer
Ken McLaughlin
Costume Designer
Debra McGuire

©Universal Studios
Production Companies
Universal Pictures
presents in association
with Relativity Media an
Apatow production
In association with A
Hot Dog and Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producer
Richard Vane

CAST

Paul Rudd
George
Jennifer Aniston
Linda
Justin Theroux
Seth
Alan Alda
Carvin
Malin Akerman
Eva
Ken Marino
Rick
Joe Lo Truglio
Wayne
Kathryn Hahn
Karen
Kerri Kenney-Silver
Kathy
Lauren Ambrose
Almond
Michaela Watkins
Marisa
Jordan Peele
Rodney

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

8,826 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS New York, the present. George loses his job in finance; his filmmaker wife Linda fails to pitch her documentary. Forced to sell their flat, the couple decide to live in Atlanta with George's wealthy brother Rick and his wife Marissa. En route they stay at a B&B, Elysium, revealed to be a hippie commune founded by Carvin and now led by Seth. George and Linda are invited to join, but decline. After spending time in Atlanta with the obnoxious Rick, however, George storms out and takes Linda back to Elysium. Unsure, Linda agrees to try the lifestyle for two weeks. Gradually, she feels more comfortable there than George does, though he is tempted by attractive Eva when she explains the commune's concept of free love.

Casino developers threaten Elysium's land; Carvin can't locate the deeds. George agrees to stay if he and Linda practise free love. Linda promptly has sex with Seth, telling George that he must sleep with Eva to make it even. A nervous George fails to bed Eva. He leaves for Rick's; Linda stays.

Seth finds the deeds and destroys them, offering the land to the developers so that he can move away with an unwitting Linda. After watching Marissa and Rick argue over Rick's infidelity, George returns to Elysium and fights with Seth. Seth's plan is revealed and everyone turns against him. Linda leaves with George.

A news report reveals that Carvin's co-founder located the deeds and saved the commune. Member Wayne became a successful novelist, published by *Wanderlust Press*, run by a happy George and Linda.

We Are Poets

United Kingdom 2011

Directors: Daniel Lucchesi,
Alex Ramseyer-Bache

In an interview at BFI Southbank after a screening of *We Are Poets*, a documentary following a group of six Leeds teenagers to Washington DC to compete at the Brave New Voices poetry slam festival, first-time directors Alex Ramseyer-Bache and Daniel Lucchesi dismiss their part in the process with the claim that, "It was the poets who did all the work, and all we had to do was follow them around." It may sound like false modesty, but it's true that Saju Ahmed, Maryam Allam, Azalia Anisko, Joseph Buckley, Rheima Ibrahiim and Kadish Morris – performing with skill and energy poems designed to give young people a voice – provide the filmmakers with dramatic material that needs little more than to be captured on camera. The film follows the group from the moment they are chosen to take part to the final competition, stitching together personal profiles with footage of rehearsals and workshops, and finally performances by the team and their American counterparts. The superb slow-motion montage of the opening scenes apart, the filmmaking is largely unobtrusive, and if the documentary lacks the charge and pace of its protagonists' performances, then at least it pays them the respect of not trying to steal the stage.

Performance poetry and spoken word are fast-growing genres that are transforming young people's image of poetry from a dusty and dreary relic of an irrelevant past to a forceful means of communicating the issues and experiences that shape their lives. In the UK, Dean Atta's 'I Am Nobody's Nigger', written following the convictions in the Stephen Lawrence murder trial, has attracted more than 35,000 views on YouTube, at a time when many poetry publishers struggle to shift a print run of 350. In the US, the Brave New Voices festival attracts some 400 teenage competitors whose skill and professionalism put the mumblings of many a more established poet to shame.

From Joseph's opening voiceover poem 'I Come from... Leeds', the emphasis in the young poets' work is on making their experiences heard – as team captain Saju puts it: "If I don't speak for my generation, who will?" Their subject-matter spans politics, love, race and religion, ranging from knife

crime and terrorism, through relationships and families, to local pride and cultural integration. Most impressive is Maryam, whose poems challenge stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed and housebound, culminating in 'America', a dialogue between the Middle East and the US personified by Maryam and Joseph. And the spine-tingling moment came during a seemingly impromptu midnight performance back at the Brave New Voices halls of residence, where a young Amercian (uncredited) sings/speaks a poem of moving intensity about her relationship with her mother.

One of the poems contains the line, "I write my life as my weapon of survival." Leeds Young Authors is indeed a lifeline to several of these teenagers, especially those designated at risk before joining the project. "So many things haven't gone right for me, but now I believe in myself," says Azalia, whose witty, spiky poem about relationships told through the metaphor of food wins her first place in the team. "I was offered poetry as a way of distracting me from my criminal activities and it's changed the way I thought about messing around," says Saju, who against all expectations is about to go to Sheffield University.

In case anyone is in doubt about the credibility of spoken word as an artform, US poet/musician Saul Williams is ushered in to explain that the tradition of oral poetry stretches back to Homer and beyond.

Williams also puts forward the idea that poetry has often been at the leading edge of recent social transformations, citing the Harlem Renaissance as kickstarting the Civil Rights Movement and the Beat poets as an impetus for the changes of the 1960s. If his theory is correct, then the resurgence of poetry within a talented new generation heralds exciting and positive times ahead. ◆ Vicky Wilson

CREDITS

Produced by
Daniel Lucchesi
Alex Ramseyer-Bache
Producer
Martin John Harris
Original Music
Samuel Sim
The Pattern Theory
Tom Stewart
Bob Bradley
Recordist
Mark Cocksedge

©Alex Ramseyer-Bache, Daniel Lucchesi,
The Northern Film
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Metropolitan University
Production Companies
A film by Alex
Ramseyer-Bache,
Daniel Lucchesi
Produced in association

with Leeds Young
Authors, The Northern
Film School at Leeds
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The Goodwin
Development Trust,
Access Moving Image
Produced under the
EPIC Award Scheme
run by the Northern
Film School at Leeds
Metropolitan University
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Khadijah Ibrahim
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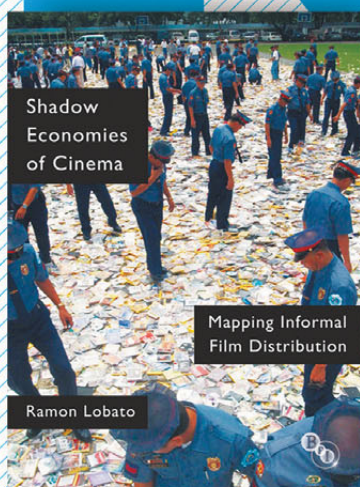
In Colour
[178:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

SYNOPSIS Leeds Young Authors is an organisation working with teenagers aged from 13 to 19, many of them designated 'young people at risk'. In 2009 a team of six are offered the chance to compete in the international youth poetry slam festival Brave New Voices in Washington DC.

Saju Ahmed, Maryam Allam, Azalia Anisko, Joseph Buckley, Rheima Ibrahiim and Kadish Morris are chosen to travel to the US, with Saju as captain. The film follows them in rehearsal and then in Washington DC at workshops for the 400 young people who attend the four-day event. Jetlagged and disoriented, they come last in the first bout of the competition but relax for the second bout and give a high-scoring performance that sees them progress to the next round. They fail to qualify for the subsequent competition in Chicago but come home feeling that they have gained from the experience.

Read



Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution

By Ramon Lobato, Cultural Histories of Cinema Series, Palgrave Macmillan/BFI Publishing, 176pp, paperback, £16.95, ISBN 9781844574117

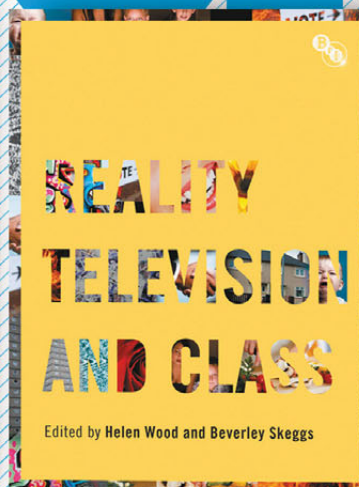
How do people access movies today? What are the most popular and powerful channels for media distribution on a global scale? How are film industries changing in the face of media convergence and digitisation? *Shadow Economies of Cinema* examines how films travel through time and space, both inside and outside established circuits of audiovisual trade. Combining industrial and cultural analysis, this book looks at distribution circuits across the Americas, Africa and the Asia-Pacific, and explains how they shape film culture in their own image. www.palgrave.com/bfi



Greta Garbo: Divine Star

By David Bret, The Robson Press, 400pp, illustrated, hardback, £20, ISBN 9781849542517

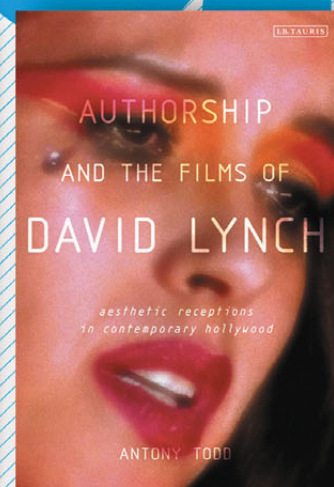
This biography is the first to fully investigate two so-called missing periods in the life of Hollywood star Greta Garbo. The first, during the late 1920s, when Garbo disappeared completely for several months, was almost certainly to conceal a pregnancy. The second occurred during World War 2, when Garbo was employed by British Intelligence to track down Nazi sympathisers. In *Greta Garbo: Divine Star* David Bret uses previously unsourced material, alongside anecdotes from friends and colleagues of Garbo, painting a complete portrait of her childhood and youth in Sweden. This is the astonishing true story of the world's most enigmatic movie star. www.therobsonpress.com/products/150



Reality Television and Class

Edited by Helen Wood and Beverley Skeggs, Palgrave Macmillan/BFI Publishing, 264pp, paperback, £19.99, ISBN 9781844573974

Despite debates about the 'classed' behaviour of reality stars such as Jade Goody, and the class confrontations depicted in shows such as *Wife Swap*, class politics have been overlooked in much academic discussion of reality television. Through an analysis of programmes such as *Celebrity Big Brother*, *The Hills*, *MasterChef* and *Ladette to Lady*, internationally renowned media scholars and sociologists explore the ways in which 'ordinary people' enter the television frame, and how discourses of class are routed through national concerns and fears. In their introduction, the editors spell out the ways in which reality television invites a serious discussion of class. www.palgrave.com/bfi



Authorship and the Films of David Lynch: Aesthetic Receptions in Contemporary Hollywood

By Antony Todd, I.B. Tauris, 224pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781848855809

Tracing the development of Lynch's career from cult obscurity with *Eraserhead*, to star auteur through the release of *Blue Velvet* and TV phenomenon *Twin Peaks*, Antony Todd examines how the director's idiosyncratic style introduced the term 'Lynchian' to the colloquial speech of new Hollywood and helped establish Lynch as the leading light among contemporary American auteurs. Todd explores contemporary manners and attitudes for artistic reputation-building, and the standards by which Lynch's reputation was dismantled following the release of *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, only to be reassembled once more through films such as *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Dr.* and *Inland Empire*. www.ibtaurisc.com

Keep your distance

The films of Mizoguchi Kenji combine detachment with intense emotional involvement, argues **Brad Stevens**

The Mizoguchi Collection

Osaka Elegy/Sisters of the Gion/The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums/Utamaro and His Five Women

Mizoguchi Kenji; Japan 1936/36/39/46; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 406 minutes total; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Of all the directors for whom greatness can be claimed, few have proved so difficult to pigeonhole as Mizoguchi Kenji, whose cinema combines the outward with the inward, movement with stillness, Kurosawa's violent action with Ozu's meditative contemplation, whose mise en scène uses long tracking shots that have all the elegance of Ophüls but tend to focus on events that are anything but elegant. Most significant of these (real or apparent) contradictions is the characteristic tone of Mizoguchi's films, in which intense identification is imbricated with critical detachment.

Mizoguchi's main concern is with the theatrical nature of both masculinity and femininity – a concern especially relevant to a patriarchal culture where gender roles are rigidly policed. The notion of theatre as a metaphor for behaviour in a conformist society is frequently literalised in the form of theatrical performances. An especially neat example can be found in 'Osaka Elegy' (1936) when Ayako (Yamada Isuzu) and her employer Sonosuke (Shiganoya Benkei) visit a bunraku (puppet) theatre and unexpectedly encounter Sonosuke's wife Sumiko (Umemura Yoko), who accuses her husband of infidelity. Mizoguchi uses shots of puppets performing on stage to comment ironically on the theatrical aspects of both the illicit affair and the resulting argument, something underlined when Sumiko is told not to "make a scene"; and Fujino (Shindo Eitaro), on being asked to pretend that Ayako came with him, complains that "it's a ridiculous role to play" (though Artificial Eye's subtitles translate this as: "That's a terrible position to be put in"). But theatricality is also evident when Ayako tells her potential fiancé Susumu (Hara Kensaku) that she has been Sonosuke's mistress. Mizoguchi stages this as a two-minute sequence shot with Ayako occupying various areas in the frame's rear and Susumu standing in the foreground at screen left: Ayako's speech is thus directed at both Susumu and the audience/camera, with Susumu functioning as our surrogate (since we can only see his back, he might be another viewer watching the onscreen events with us). But the fact that we can't



Flower power: 'The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums'

His cinema combines the outward with the inward, movement with stillness

see Susumu's face means that we, like Ayako (who delivers most of her speech while facing away from Susumu), are left wondering what his response will be to the confession. As so often in Mizoguchi, identification is split between more than one character, thus allowing us to consider from a detached perspective events with which we are involved emotionally. When Ayako withdraws even further from Susumu, and addresses some comments ("If I keep going on like this, I don't know how far I'll fall. When I think about it, I feel sorry for myself") to a window in the extreme background of the image, is her gesture theatrical or spontaneous? Is it even possible to make a distinction between the two?

Until recently, Mizoguchi was poorly represented on DVD, so the appearance of this four-disc set from Artificial Eye (who have already given us discs of 'The Lady of Musashino' and 'The Life of Oharu'), alongside Masters of Cinema's four double-bills (themselves now available as a single box-set) and Criterion/Eclipse's 'Fallen Women' collection, is most

welcome. Whereas Masters of Cinema focused on Mizoguchi's later work, three of the four titles newly released by Artificial Eye in both standard and Blu-ray formats – 'Osaka Elegy', 'Sisters of the Gion' (both 1936) and 'The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums' (1939) – are taken from that period in the second half of the 1930s when the director was exploring radical and feminist politics. The seemingly odd film out here is 'Utamaro and His Five Women' (1946), made under quite different conditions, during America's occupation of Japan. The connections between the two titles from 1936, both of which star Yamada Isuzu (and can also be found in Eclipse's set), are obvious, and have been well analysed by Mark Le Fanu in 'Mizoguchi and Japan' (BFI, 2005) and Robin Wood in 'Sexual Politics and Narrative Film' (Columbia University Press, 1998). As Wood observed, 'Osaka Elegy' is "as single-mindedly dedicated to the analysis of the oppression of women within the family as 'Sisters of the Gion' is beyond it, to the extent that each film seems to necessitate the other". But if these two films form a kind of diptych, the same might also be said of 'Chrysanthemums' and 'Utamaro', which both use male protagonists to express their feminist concerns: although the central character in each film is an acclaimed male artist –

Kabuki actor Kikunosuke (Hanayagi Shotaro) in the former, painter Utamaro Kitagama (Bando Minosuke) in the latter – Mizoguchi's emphasis is on the women around them who can only express their own creativity by supporting and inspiring the men (a process viewed with bitter irony in 'Chrysanthemums', in which Kikunosuke achieves fame by playing women on stage). In this context, it is unfortunate that Artificial Eye's DVD of 'Utamaro' has been packaged under the American title, which, as Jonathan Rosenbaum argued in 'Monthly Film Bulletin' in December 1976, is "misleading and offensive": the Japanese title can more correctly be translated as 'Five Women Around Utamaro'.

Artificial Eye's transfers are as good as the source materials allow. 'Chrysanthemums' has never looked better, though that's not saying much: the image, while sharp and clear, is frequently obscured by shimmering. The subtitles are vastly superior to those on the print screened at the Barbican in London in 2010 (in which the kabuki scenes were untranslated). The Blu-ray editions make the picture grain far more evident, to the extent that darker sequences in 'Osaka Elegy' and 'Sisters of the Gion' seem to be taking place behind a lace curtain: ironically, the cheaper DVDs provide a more satisfying viewing experience.

NEW RELEASES

American Dreams (lost and found)/Landscape Suicide

James Benning; US 1984/86; Edition Filmmuseum/Region 0 DVD: 53/92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3 PAL; Features: booklet

Film: Film or digital? The quandary may seem dated in 2012, but for someone like James Benning, who built his career on 16mm production and exhibition, it can still feel like a Sophie's Choice. While officially prolific as a digital media artist today – five features, installations and numerous shorts including YouTube found-footage works to his name since transitioning to high-definition video in 2008 – Benning resisted making his films available on DVD until only recently. "It's become apparent that 16mm is disappearing," he has said, and that digitisation is the best way to keep his work "alive and accessible". And so it is that a (happily, region-free) collaboration with the Austrian Filmmuseum has created a boon for serious film viewers everywhere.

The new series is inaugurated with a two-disc set of mid-career works emblematic of Benning's oeuvre, which lays bare the political encoding of the social and physical American landscape via deft formal construction.

A provocative chronology of mid-20th century US history, *American Dreams* is experienced in its first moments as overwhelming chaos: baseball memorabilia, pop music, political speech, typed annotation, scrolling handwritten journal entries. Yet as one's attention adjusts to negotiate these layers, background and foreground, text and subtext are tellingly reconfigured. Benning's interest in the formulation of hero and antihero surfaces here and continues to resonate through his subsequent film, *Landscape Suicide*. Here the filmmaker trains his lens on violence lurking in the substrata of idyllic Americana. Presented as a suburban/rural diptych, the film examines two murders committed decades apart in distant towns. How does a horrific act live on in the place where it occurred? Is it really the perpetrator alone who is implicated? As always, Benning's work creates space for viewers to consider these questions for themselves.

Discs: Now steward of Benning's original 16mm elements, the Filmmuseum is producing these discs from beautiful 3K scans and HD transfers made during the preservation process. An accompanying booklet contains an essay on the films by Barbara Pichler adapted from a Filmmuseum monograph published in 2007, as well as a statement by Benning. Expect more releases this year: *RR and Casting a Glance* (both 2007), and *Deseret* (1995) and *Four Corners* (1997). (VB-S)

Il boom

Vittorio De Sica; Italy 1963; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 97 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: Perhaps it's the current credit crunch that makes De Sica's sardonic comedy, about uxorious husband Giovanni drowning in debt in the



The Doom Generation Araki's lovingly lurid celebration of Gen X rebellion gets the blend of outrage, cinema homage, high style and low insult down pat

consumer excess of the early 1960s, feel newly resonant. Puzzlingly marginalised until recently in surveys of De Sica's *commedia all'Italiana* period, it's a bittersweet satire of the wife-swapping, Twist-dancing, get-rich-quick lifestyle, underpinned by a deliciously mocking script from De Sica's longtime collaborator Cesare Zavattini and the callous, neon-shiny cityscapes of DP Armando Nannuzzi. As Giovanni, Alberto Sordi expertly blends clowning, contempt and desperation, wrapping his pleas to friends for loans in a gay and ghastly humour that turns a tennis match into an extended humiliation. Having experienced the black comic bleakness of the film's ending, you'll never hear that jaunty guitar-picking instrumental 'Wheels' in quite the same way again.

Disc: A presentable transfer, packaged without extras even though it's a 50th-anniversary edition. Surely there's an original trailer or newsreel footage of the premiere languishing in a vault somewhere? (KS)

The Doom Generation

Gregg Araki; US/France 1995; Second Sight/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 80 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic widescreen; Features: 'My Generation' interview with Gregg Araki, commentary with Gregg Araki, Rose McGowan, James Duval and Johnathon Schaech

Film: Famously awarded 'zero stars' by Roger Ebert on its original release for its flip and vivid violence and lack of moral compass, Gregg Araki's lovingly lurid celebration of Gen X rebellion and fluid sexuality now seems less the harbinger of the (teen) apocalypse than the essence of 1990s nihilism, right down to Nine Inch Nails on the soundtrack. As a blackly comic road movie, in which Johnathon Schaech's amoral drifter imports troilism and random, cartoonish killings into a sullen, trash-talking teen romance, it's weathered

well. The decapitated-but-still-talking head in the relish tray continues to prompt a bark of surprised laughter, and the lushly artificial art direction ravishes the eye with its blood red or giddily chequer-boarded motel rooms. A high point of the New Queer Cinema (unlike its successor, the cranked and crammed *Nowhere*), in which Araki gets the blend of outrage, cinema homage (*Bande à part*, *They Live by Night*), high style and low insult ("That guy has the intelligence of a stool sample") down pat.

Disc: A pretty transfer, which shows off the film's faintly surreal image-making and popping palette. As well as a giggle, anecdotal commentary with his cast, Araki contributes a thoughtful analysis of the film and its influences. (KS)

Encounters: Four Ground-Breaking Classics of Gay Cinema

Dream A40/Vapors/ Come Dancing/Encounter

Lloyd Reckord/Andy Milligan/Bill Douglas/Peter de Rome; UK/US/UK/US 1965/65/70/71; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 16/31/13/13 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: Lloyd Reckord in conversation at BFI Southbank, 24-page illustrated booklet

Films: These four short films are packaged as "ground-breaking" and



Road movie: 'Dream A40'

"classics of gay cinema", both of which observations are unassailably true. The first and last are the most familiar: *Dream A40* by Lloyd Reckord is a nervy, black-and-white road movie set in, every sense, just outside Swinging London; *Encounter* by Peter de Rome is a colour-saturated mood-poem set in 1970s New York, where tanned young men are summoned by a kind of trance-like state towards an orgy of wordless pleasure.

But we also have a silky and disturbing student film from Bill Douglas (*My Childhood, My Ain Folk*), who never described himself as gay. In his 1970 *Come Dancing*, a young man appears to be picking up another, slightly older chap in an out-of-season Southend café, only to have a knife pulled on him at the clench. And in *Vapors* by Andy Milligan, a relatively inexperienced gay man visits a downtown New York bathhouse, only to find himself talking to a self-hating married man out on the down-low. The great pleasure of *Vapors* is its 'off-off-Broadway' flavour, capturing the vanished theatre of Caffè Cino.

With both *Dream A40* and *Vapors*, an air of the illicit is palpable. The policeman who arrests the speeding gay couple in *Dream A40* and then conducts them to a sinister compound is a genuine figure of fear, while at the same time subtly eroticised. In *Vapors*, the grim bathhouse room in which the story unfolds seems analogous to some kind of cell, both anticipating Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) and recalling Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950). It's worth pointing out that *Vapors* preceded the Stonewall riots, while *Dream A40* came before the UK decriminalisation of homosexual acts, and the illegality was quite genuine. And yet it takes a nominally heterosexual director like Bill Douglas to produce the only note of public defiance here, when his gay character sees off a homophobic youth with a mocking smile, by the sea in Kent, irresistibly drawing to mind Derek Jarman and Dungeness.

Disc: With its distressed look and often very poor sound, technical quality is not at a premium with this disc, but if anything the samizdat found-materials feel complements the subject-matter. The elision of male genitalia in the final frame of *Vapors* – violently scratched out – brings it close to a gallery art project, whereas the film-school finesse of *Come Dancing* offers more in the way of formal pleasures. (RC)

Her Private Hell

Norman J. Warren; UK 1967; BFI Flipside/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: original trailer, alternative uncensored US sequences, screen tests, 'making of', two Norman J. Warren short films, 'The Anatomy of a Pin-up' documentary, booklet

Film: Norman J. Warren's first feature might well be "the UK's first narrative sex film" but it has precious little sex and falls into that odd category of hypocritical exposé – trading on the smut it ostensibly condemns. Italian

NEW RELEASES

model Marisa (Lucia Modugno) is imported into Britain and lodged in the studio of photographer Bernie (Terence Skelton) – a white space dominated by a cod-Lichtenstein comic-book dogfight but lodged in a horror-movie old dark house. It's plain from the ominous glances exchanged between the various conspirators (led by demon-bearded Robert Crewdson) that some cruel scam is involved in their promotion of Marisa as a cover girl.

Modern viewers will assume she's to be sold into sex slavery or star in snuff movies or be sacrificed to Satan – but the sting is that nude pictures of her will be sold to Continental magazines. Modugno doesn't even do nudity (except in alternative scenes from the US version, included as an extra here), so her shock when confronted with explicit shots not shown to the audience is weirdly disproportionate. Even in 1967, it was obvious (as demonstrated by the fascinating curio of David Cohen's documentary short *The Anatomy of a Pin-Up*, another extra) that plenty of pretty young women were willing to take off their clothes for a living and so there was little need to press-gang naive cover-girl wannabes for the meat-grinder. Shot in *noirish* black and white on tiny sets, with weird undercurrents in the heroine's affairs, the film has creepy

atmosphere but must have seemed tame a few months after it came out.

Disc: As usual with Flipside releases, the extras are exemplary. Besides a booklet with contributions from Josephine Botting, David McGillivray and Lynn Barber (who appears in *The Anatomy of a Pin-Up*), the package includes two early Warren shorts (*Fragment* was previously included on the coffin-shaped set of Warren's horror films, but *Incident* makes its debut 50 years after it was begun), screen tests (including some priceless dancing from Udo Kier, who didn't get the job) and a retrospective with fascinating anecdote from Warren and screenwriter Glynn Christian. (KN)

Italian Crime Collection: Fernando Di Leo

**Caliber 9/The Italian Connection/
The Boss/Rulers of the City**

Fernando Di Leo; Italy; 1972/72/73/76;
RaroVideo/Region 1 DVD; 102/100/112/
96 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features:
booklet, photo gallery, documentaries

Films: Marked by both political violence and violence altogether without ideology, the 1970s in Italy are now remembered as the *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'), a time of lawlessness unknown since the bravos of Caravaggio's age. For cerebral interpretations of the



Painted lady: Joan Bennett and Edward G. Robinson in 'Scarlet Street'

behind-the-scenes forces at work in this tumultuous era, we may turn to Leonardo Sciascia's novels or the films of Francesco Rosi; for the common Italian viewer, however, a ticket to one of Fernando Di Leo's street-tough movies offered a frontline view of the crossfire.

The Apulian son of a lawyer, Di Leo (who died in 2003) began his film career as a screenwriter, with uncredited work on Sergio Leone's 'Man with No Name' films, leading to a byline on many popular movies of the 1960s spaghetti-western craze. Di Leo's legacy of brutality, however, is based on the films grouped together here by RaroVideo, putatively belonging to the *poliziotteschi* genre and showing contemporary urban Italy as a place of frontier lawlessness. *Caliber 9*, *The Italian Connection* and *The Boss* have been joined together under the rubric 'The Milieu Trilogy' (though *Rulers of the City*, the other film in RaroVideo's set, is entirely of a piece with its precedents). *Poliziotteschi* roughly translates as 'police-procedural', but the protagonists of these four films are outlaws even within outlawry, middle-to-low-level figures in the criminal hierarchy who find themselves at war with both the authorities and the upper echelons of the corporatised underworld – frequently seen to be working in concert.

The first two 'Milieu' films are based, quite loosely, on works by Milanese author Giorgio Scerbanenco, a figure analogous to Hammett or Chandler in the US, considered the father of Italian crime fiction (and the subject of *Scerbanenco Noir*, one of the many documentaries included in RaroVideo's box-set).

Di Leo's trademarks include a swarming camera that gets right on top of fistfights and go-go dances; shoe-leather location-shoots that intuitively nab variegated set-ups; slashing angles later to be cut together in dizzying flick-and-jab combinations. The most obvious showplace for Di Leo's stick-and-move is a lung-burning extended chase in *The Italian Connection* which has Mario Adorf's mad-dog pimp,

with reckless disregard for his own life, running down the killer of his wife and daughter, finally butting in the windshield of a moving getaway car with his own head.

Di Leo's films are outspoken in their comprehensive disillusion with the social order. "Not only gangsters!" says Harry Baer in *Rulers of the City*, planning to expand bribery operations after a successful shakedown. "Think about what real businessmen have to hide!" The cooperative combination of capitalist, Church and *capo* is taken for granted – all the overbosses have crucifixes prominently riveted to their desks. When not more effectively woven into the material of the narrative, Di Leo's social concerns are aired in polemic dialogue that turns his characteristically energetic films suddenly sluggardly – the office-bound scenes in *Caliber 9*, in which Frank Wolff and Luigi Pistilli as police commissioner and underlying respectively mouth rightwing and reformist nostrums, are a typical example.

Di Leo comes over in the documentaries included here as a wry, intelligent man with a well-stocked library, identifying himself and, implicitly, his scurrilous movies as "connected to the values of the 18th century in France – Voltaire basically". (Government minister Giovanni Gioia wasn't impressed, however: when his name was mentioned in *The Boss* along with two fellow Christian Democrats, he briefly filed a defamation suit against Di Leo.)

Di Leo's casts were, in a style typical of Italian pictures of the era, patchwork international assemblages, where it was nothing unusual to bring together a veteran of Fassbinder's Anti-Theater group (Baer), a Hollywood expat gone downmarket (Jack Palance) and a classical Italian actor (Vittorio Gassman) – as *Rulers of the City* does. Di Leo particularly adored brick-red Adorf for his big, voluble performances and, for his taciturnity, Brooklyn-born Henry Silva (misspelled as 'Sylva' on one DVD sleeve). In one interview, Di

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Leo enthuses over “marble face” Silva, the lead in *The Boss* who also co-stars with Woody Strode in *The Italian Connection*: “[You] could have made a mould of him from the waist up and he wouldn’t even need to show up... He only had three expressions.”

Typical of Italian production, all dialogue was recorded after shooting, thus avoiding a babel of accents (among those who could at least speak phonetic Italian, that is) and allowing Di Leo’s camera to go headlong into the melee. The vital result was married to Argentine Luis Bacalov’s prog-inflected soundtracks, and the combination is as rough and ready as in those days when, per one interviewee, “Milan had basically become like Chicago.”

Discs: Material from the same interview sessions, and indeed some of the same excerpts, are spread across the documentary featurettes, produced by *Nocturno*, the Italian fanzine dedicated to genre film which did much to revive interest in Di Leo. (NP)

Films by Fritz Lang

The Spiders

Germany/US 1919-20; Kino Classics/
Region 1 NTSC DVD; 173 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: gallery

Scarlet Street

Germany/US 1945; Kino Classics/
Region 1 NTSC DVD and Blu-ray;
102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1;
Features: audio commentary, gallery

Films: The extraordinary 44-year career of Fritz Lang has undergone decades of dedicated exegesis, and yet it still seems to harbour curious, repressed mysteries. We think we know what ‘Langian’ is – but what about *Liliom* (1934), of all things, the only film he made in France after fleeing Germany? What might be most at odds with how Lang is perceived – as cinema’s premier proto-nihilist, the paradigmatic and precise visualiser of personal conflict, grim violence and poisoned humanity – is his joyous sense of pulp irony. Throw a rock and you’ll hit a Langian celebrating the auteur for his ‘tragic’ purity, but the boyish zest for the wicked clockwork of genre storytelling ever present in Lang has gone almost entirely overlooked. He’s closer to Hitchcock than we’ve supposed – both spike their films’ dramatic sincerity with a self-conscious love for the way narratives can tie us up in knots.

Lang’s performances are a clue – compared to Hitchcock’s or Ophüls’s, Lang’s characters often wink at us, and seem to revel in their own violent plights. (Hence, if you watch 1943’s *Hangmen Also Die!* and 1956’s *While the City Sleeps* side by side, you get a sense of who could be regarded as Lang’s contemporary heir: Tarantino.)

Kino’s two new Lang releases, both overdue for proper digital transfers, are classic examples. Certainly, *The Spiders* (1919-20) is nothing if not pulp in aboriginal form, obviously imitating Feuillade in some particulars (an Irma Vep-style villainess and, oh, that deliciously nutty Euro-notion of the ‘underworld’ being as organised and

Trains of thought

Geoffrey Macnab finds four directors staking out new territory for an emerging generation in post-war Poland

Polish Cinema Classics

Eroica/Night Train/Goodbye, See You Tomorrow/Innocent Sorcerers

Andrzej Munk/Jerzy Kawalerowicz/Janusz Morgenstern/Andrzej Wajda; Poland 1957/59/60/60; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; Certificate 12; 81/94/82/84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.56:1/1.33:1/1.66:1/1.33:1; Features: Andrzej Munk short ‘A Walk in the Old Town of Warsaw’, ‘About Night Train’ (documentary extract), four booklets, interview with Andrzej Wajda

In ‘Entanglement’, the recent Polish thriller by Jacek Bromski, there is a scene in which a sinister elderly character with links to the old Communist regime laments the lack of intellectual curiosity among the younger generation. “They did a survey recently in primary schools. Fifty-five per cent of them didn’t know what the Warsaw Uprising was... in 2009, 67 per cent of Poles hadn’t read so much as one book a year. When I was in school, you fucking discussed books during break – Kafka, Salinger, Gombrowicz. And James Joyce... is this the price we have to pay for democracy? The complete dumbing down of the nation?”

‘Entanglement’ is undistinguished genre fare, but it’s hard not to think about the old-timer’s remarks when you watch the four films included in Second Run’s ‘Polish Cinema Classics’ collection (all produced through Kadr). Dating from 1957 to 1960, the films were made by contemporaries of that old-timer who clearly knew their Kafka and Joyce (and American jazz as well). Only one of these pictures, Andrzej Munk’s ‘Eroica’, is directly about the war – part of the fascination of the other three is how self-consciously they avoid references to politics, and how hard they try to stake out new territory for an emerging generation. Their frame of reference is often surprising, and they have nothing in common with the dogma of socialist realism.

Laden with references both to Hitchcock thrillers and to David Lean’s ‘Brief Encounter’, Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s ‘Night Train’ combines surrealistic and experimental elements with character-based observation and comedy. The eerie, echoing vocals hummed by a female voice on the jazz soundtrack by Andrzej Trzaskowski add to the disorienting effect. The setting is a crowded overnight train; there’s a killer on the loose. At the same time, stuck in third class is Staszek (played by Zbigniew Cybulski, the ‘James Dean of the East’). The beautiful blonde (Lucyna Winnicka) he loves is much further up the train,



Tanked up: ‘Eroica’

sharing a compartment with a stranger (Leon Niemczyk) who wears dark glasses and looks as if he’s on leave from a Chris Marker film. Kawalerowicz accentuates both the grotesquerie and the eroticism – there are close-up shots of the prying faces who cram the corridors of the train, as well as fetishistic shots of the blonde. (Watching the couple together in the carriage, you can’t help but think of Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint in ‘North by Northwest’, or Madeleine Carroll and Robert Donat in ‘The 39 Steps’.)

The tone of ‘Eroica’, meanwhile, is close to that of the Bohumil Hrabal adaptations that Czech director Jirí Menzel would later make. The two-part film takes a very ironic approach to the idea of wartime heroism. In the first part, a hard-drinking womaniser (Edward Dziewonski) becomes a courier between the Hungarian army and the Polish freedom fighters. We see him blundering across the frontlines, getting inebriated with a telephonist and, at one stage, sitting exhausted on a river bank as a German tank pulls up behind him. If he is a hero, he’s a very perverse and self-pitying one. While this story is tinged with humour and pathos, the second part is far darker. Polish officers in a POW camp keep up morale by invoking the memory of their valiant colleague Zawistowski, who (they believe) made a heroic escape. In fact, he is hiding in the rafters of their compound, growing ever more sickly. Munk ridicules the pomposity and hypocrisy of an officer class clinging to old notions of military honour while behaving in an utterly

What’s fascinating is how self-consciously these films avoid references to politics

passive way themselves. The only real hero among them is the loner who despises their rituals and is so irked by them that he simply tries to walk through the barbed wire.

Those who know Zbigniew Cybulski as the charismatic but tragic figure from Andrzej Wajda’s ‘Ashes and Diamonds’ (1958) will be surprised by just how playful he is in both Janusz Morgenstern’s ‘Goodbye, See You Tomorrow’ and Wajda’s ‘Innocent Sorcerers’. In the former, he is a good-looking but gauche member of a radical theatre group, trying to court the beautiful young Marguerite (Teresa Tuszynska). We see him playing tennis with an ineptitude that makes Jacques Tati look world-class and being forever brushed aside by his more worldly-wise friends (including a youthful Roman Polanski). Cybulski is in equally playful groove in ‘Innocent Sorcerers’ in a supporting role as the friend and confidant of Tadeusz Lominicki’s jazz-playing doctor.

Both films are militantly apolitical. The protagonists are young, charismatic and very cultured; they want to build their own identity, not to have to refer always to their parents or to the war or to the politicians. Wajda (who felt he was too old himself really to understand this generation) recruited young poet-boxer Jerzy Skolimowski to help him write ‘Innocent Sorcerers’. Prefiguring his own film ‘Walkover’, Skolimowski even has a cameo as a boxer with a cut eye. The film ran into huge problems with the censors, who disapproved of the fecklessness of the younger generation. (In a revealing new interview included on the disc, Wajda explains how upset the authorities were about a scene in which the main character turns off a tape recorder with his toe, thereby apparently insulting both Polish technology and the dignity of the Polish worker.)

As the complaining character in ‘Entanglement’ suggests, old-timers are always intensely suspicious of the younger generation – there are grumbles about Polish youth today just as there were 50 years ago when these films were made. The difference, though, is that no one could accuse Cybulski and co of being uncultured – even if they didn’t discuss the Warsaw Uprising or the future of Communist Poland, we can take it as guaranteed that they knew their Kafka and Salinger. Whatever else, they weren’t ‘dumbed down’.

All four films are presented in pristine restored versions, approved and supervised by either the director or cinematographer who made them. There is such clarity here that we are able to register the often very subtle sound editing and use of music. And on ‘Night Train’, the chiaroscuro photography of Jan Laskowski seems especially fresh and striking. Extras include documentaries and booklets containing lengthy contextual essays.

The art of seeing

A 16th-century masterpiece is brought to cinematic life in Lech Majewski's remarkable new film. **Tim Lucas** reports

The Mill & The Cross

Lech Majewski; Poland/Sweden 2011; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1; Features: 'The World According to Bruegel' documentary, Lech Majewski interview, trailers, stills gallery

In his impressive 2004 feature *'The Garden of Earthly Delights'*, a film shot entirely with a compact camcorder, writer-director Lech Majewski told the story of a man who agrees to assist his terminally ill art-historian lover in making a documentary about Hieronymus Bosch's eponymous 16th-century painting, which they proceed to study from the inside by recreating its details environmentally in their Venice love nest. The result was a fascinating hybrid of narrative and essay. In this, his latest film, Majewski does much the same thing with another masterpiece from the same period, Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *'The Procession to Calvary'*, but in this case erotic love is left out of it, as are the modern conveniences of protagonist and narrative in the most familiar senses of those words. Instead, he uses the opportunities afforded by 90 minutes of cinema, and the digital technologies presently available, to more fully immerse his audience, and himself, in this 450-year-old painting – historically, compositionally, subtextually, texturally, chromatically and, of course, symbolically. What the film offers in place of traditional narrative is the progressive sense of discovery that comes with learning how to see, how to value more thoroughly the content delivered within the equivalent of a single frame of film.

'The Procession to Calvary' depicts Jesus Christ dragging the cross to the site of his crucifixion, passing through a large valley densely peopled with character and emotion. The mini-dramas surrounding this primal sacrifice evoke sorrow and celebration, horror and caring, drunkenness and nurturing – the whole great pageant of life, staged as a foreground to Christ's agony and a background to his mother's woe. These masses and their emotions, the film notes early on, are so overwhelming that the subject of the painting becomes in some ways its most hidden facet, yet it is the hub from which all else radiates. If you were to visit the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where the original canvas resides, and in a rush to take in as many masterpieces as you possibly could in an afternoon, your glance might not absorb that *'The Procession'* is at least a double exposure, depicting two simultaneous planes of time. The



Portrait of the artist: Rutger Hauer as Pieter Bruegel the Elder in *'The Mill & the Cross'*

multitudes surrounding the drama of Christ's last hour depict events that were unfolding in Bruegel's adopted city of Brussels 1,600 years after the Crucifixion: the red-jacketed horsemen scattered throughout the painting's mid-range are the Spanish militia who came to Brussels in the wake of their Flemish conquest to found Catholicism. The wheel-capped posts at the death-dominant right of the composition, which recede into the distance beyond a barren field (much as they do in Ken Russell's *'The Devils'*), were their favoured means of dealing with Protestants and feeding the local crows. Furthermore, in the background of the painting and rising high above its landscape is a mountain capped by a windmill, its blades forming a cross; it is operated by a silhouetted miller seen gazing over a walled precipice at the spectacles below, his face and emotions unknowable. Herein lies another level of the painting, we're told, a metaphoric depiction of God in His Heaven, milling the wheat that is baked into the bread that becomes the sacramental body of Christ. It is not mentioned that Bruegel was born in the city of Breda, or that bread is called 'pain' in some countries, but herein lies the value of independent study.

Just as Bruegel's painting occupies more than one temporal plane, *'The Mill & the Cross'* simultaneously observes the painting from the perspectives of the artist (Rutger Hauer) and his patron Nicolaes Jonghelinck (Michael York), and from inside the skins of the myriad people who occupy it, including the Virgin Mary (Charlotte Rampling) and,

What it offers in place of traditional narrative is the progressive sense of discovery that comes with learning how to see

at least by inference, the director and his audience. There is very little dialogue – just enough to be instructive, forcing viewers to rely more on their eyes for information than most films do, regardless of their visual bombast. Because the film focuses to such an extent on the content of a static image, the eye is particularly educated in terms of depth via the impressive digital layering of real, animated and three-dimensional miniature elements. Kino Lorber's Blu-ray delivers an experience that is 3D in feel, if not in fact.

In the accompanying documentary, which touches on a number of coincidences that make the film feel mystically fated, Majewski explains that Bruegel was always the most important of his masters, and that he made this film in order to "meet" him. However, it was not his idea to make the film: he was approached by art historian Michael Gibson, who came away from seeing his 2000 film *'Angelus'* convinced that Majewski was "a Bruegelian filmmaker" and the man who should adapt Gibson's own book-length study of Bruegel's painting into a documentary. "But I am not a documentarist," Majewski reasoned, which led them to collaborate on this combination museum-and-theatrical piece, exactly the sort of film the two lovers in *'The Garden of Earthly Delights'* might have produced had time been kinder to them. Deciding they needed "someone like Rutger Hauer" to play Bruegel, they went directly to Hauer, who eagerly accepted, having lived with a reproduction of Bruegel's painting on the wall of his room till he left home at 15. Rampling, meanwhile, had emailed Majewski out of the blue after seeing his 1997 picture *'The Roe's Room'* on DVD, a film she took so personally that she volunteered her dramatic services if he should ever need them. The documentary also offers a glimpse of the director summoning the Holy Mother to take her position on set with the encouraging murmur: "Rock and roll."

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hierarchical as modern corporations) but also looking forward to the Mabuse films and *M* (1931) in its stylistic choices (the underworld organisation convening in a steel-panelled chamber, wearing top hats). A two-part serial that whiplashes from the Inca temples of Peru to San Francisco and back again, *The Spiders* is vintage hokum, buoyant and brisk and blithely racist, a brother film to the Indian Epic diptych (1959) and a harbinger of Langian things to come. (Just as the outdoor temple scenes look forward to the gigantism of 1924's *Siegfried*, the second half's uptick in urban spatial subterfuge suggests Mabuse and the American films, where Lang always seemed more comfortable indoors.)

Adapting Renoir's *La Chienne*, *Scarlet Street* (1945) is renowned as one of Lang's greatest bell-jar proto-noirs, but a second look at it reveals an impish whimsy, inherent in the urban-squalor-meets-cosy-backlot-camp setting, Joan Bennett's modulated but outrageous *pétasse fatale* (compare her readings here to her nuanced presence in Ophüls's *The Reckless Moment* four years later), Dan Duryea's near-comic pimp-hood and, in fact, the gist of the Georges de la Fourchardière plot as it's adapted, a satire on modern art-world fashion-making that hints at the farcical thrust of Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There* and Banksy's *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. Only Edward G. Robinson, as the milquetoast amateur painter suckered by tramp grifters and driven to homicide, retains a palpably earnest heartbeat in this hermetically closed-off world, and we pity him as acutely as we adore the filthy Bennett, flicking grape seeds into a sink of dishes and growling, when Robinson goes down to paint her toenails, "They'll be masterpieces..." The final attack with the ice pick is classic cold-blooded Lang – in 1945 no one else was going there – but so is the bubbly, sardonic mousetrap world around it. **Discs:** While *Scarlet Street*'s HD master and Blu-ray presentation are a vast improvement over the muddy prints heretofore available, the restoration of *The Spiders* is the news, being more than half an hour longer than previous editions. (MA)

Lifetime

Alfred Hitchcock; US 1944; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-Ray and Region 2 DVD Dual-Format; 98 Minutes; Aspect Ratio: 1.37:1; Features: 'Bon Voyage', 'Aventure Malgache', making-of documentary, Drew Casper audio commentary, audio excerpt from 1962 Hitchcock-Truffaut interview, booklet

Film: Hitchcock was already on American soil when war was declared in 1939, lured by Selznick to make a film about the Titanic – a project ultimately abandoned in favour of *Rebecca*. The fact that Hitch didn't jump on the first boat home caused a stir back in Britain, where his former boss Michael Balcon was only the most prominent figure in the UK film industry to accuse him of being unpatriotic. The myth grew up that Hitchcock did little to serve the war

effort, but in fact he addressed the war throughout his wartime features, and never more directly than in the 1944 *Lifeboat*, a John Steinbeck-penned story about the assorted survivors of a German torpedo who find themselves adrift in the Atlantic. Among the cast of characters in the cramped lifeboat are a journalist (played in glorious style by Tallulah Bankhead), and a suspicious German U-Boat captain, whose unwavering self-interest Hitchcock contrasts with the bickering of the other passengers, making the point that the Allied countries had to unite to defeat the ruthless Nazi menace – a plea that was nevertheless misunderstood by many critics at the time, who damned the film as damaging for morale. Though it's acquired a reputation as one of Hitchcock's 'minor' works, it holds up remarkably. Inventive, suspenseful and witty, it's also fascinating as Hitchcock's first attempt to shoot almost entirely on a single-set, anticipating *Rope*, *Dial M for Murder* and *Rear Window*. **Discs:** The source negative was apparently in poor condition, but the HD restoration still looks exemplary on the Blu-ray. The many extras include Hitchcock's two wartime French-language propaganda films. (JB)

Miracle in Milan/Il tetto

Vittorio De Sica; Italy 1951/56; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format ('Il tetto' DVD only); Certificate U/PG; 97/93 minutes ('Il tetto' 94 minutes); Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: interviews, newsreel, trailer, booklet

Film: The ugly duckling quacking cheerfully in the post-war neorealist pond, Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini's often bewildering yet strangely beguiling oddity *Miracle in Milan* is described accurately in Pasquale Iannone's booklet essay (included with this Arrow release) as "the missing link between Chaplin and Fellini". Magical-realist long before the term became fashionable, it begins with a baby turning up in a cabbage patch and ends with the downtrodden masses flying over the Piazza del Duomo on massed broomsticks. But in the middle it offers a critique of capitalist exploitation in general and Milanese housing policies in particular that's as hard-hitting as anything else in the De Sica-Zavattini canon, no matter how implausibly miraculous their proposed solutions this time round. The sadly short-lived Francesco Golisano holds it together as the hyper-enthusiastic human whirlwind Totò, his name a legacy of the project's genesis as an overtly comic screenplay intended for the popular Neapolitan comedian.

Given that it's no longer the mid-1950s, and we're no longer jaded with neorealism (or at least we no longer regard it as a vital source of creative commentary on the here and now), there's no obvious reason why the poignant *Il tetto* (*The Roof*) should remain comparatively obscure when set against De Sica's earlier *Shoeshine* (1946), *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Umberto D* (1952). Again scripted by Zavattini, it similarly



Lifeboat It's fascinating as Hitchcock's first attempt to shoot almost entirely on a single-set, anticipating 'Rope', 'Dial M For Murder' and 'Rear Window'

fuses keen sociological observations (this time of the downsides of Rome's post-war 'economic miracle') with absorbing human drama. Admittedly, the theme of a newlywed couple trying to negotiate the byzantine housing market and get a permanent roof over their heads without having to deal with unscrupulous landlords or unscheduled evictions is less immediately heart-clutching than the situations in the earlier films, but the race-against-time final act provides ample compensation. **Discs:** This generous package presents both features in very acceptable transfers that don't quite match the lustre of Masters of Cinema's 1950s Antonioni discs. Short interviews with the director's son Manuel and actress Brunella Bovo, and the usual comprehensive booklet (with new essays on both films by Pasquale Iannone and a 1951 *S&S* report on the film's reception) provide useful context. (MB)

Films by Edgar Reitz

Lust for Love

West Germany 1967; Bluebell Films/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

The Tailor from Ulm

West Germany 1978; Bluebell Films/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 112 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1 anamorphic

Films: Since the 1980s, Edgar Reitz has become so synonymous with his great *Heimat* project that it's easy to forget he was once a leading and prolific member of the New German Cinema generation which emerged in the mid-1960s.

Lust for Love, his ambitious feature debut, is essentially a chronological portrait of the often troubled relationship between Elisabeth (Heidi Stroh) and Rolf (Georg Hauke) as they negotiate the hurdles of studies, careers, marriage, multiple children, religion and

associated emotional traumas, complicated by their fundamental incompatibility – she's an impulsively strong-willed proto-feminist, he's a human doormat given to disappearing for long periods without finding much of anything, let alone himself. But what makes this familiar material so fresh, even 45 years on, is Reitz's treatment, which alternates handheld visual intimacy (extreme close-ups of facial and other bodily features) and bouts of quasi-surrealism (a corridor strewn with slimy, flapping fish) with a clinically detached documentary-style narration given to such deadpan understatements as, "The advent of a fifth child coerces Rolf to improve his income."

A gargantuan flop at the time, *The Tailor from Ulm* nearly bankrupted Reitz and forced a significant career rethink. It's a biopic of Albrecht Berblinger (1770-1829), a tailor-turned-inventor who came as close as anyone prior to the Wright Brothers to creating a viable flying machine, even if it was essentially a hang glider. Dramatically much more conventional than its predecessor, the film is nonetheless

Poetry in motion: 'Blood Wedding'



an engaging piece on its own terms, with Tilo Prückner's driven Berblinger pursuing his extravagant aerial obsessions in the face of both keen competition from sometimes better-funded and more aerodynamically knowledgeable rivals and historical distractions spanning the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (in retrospect, a preview of how Reitz would inveigle great events into ordinary lives in *Heimat*). Much of the budget was spent on the meticulous reconstructions of the era's flying machines: one inventor boasts that his contraption includes 3,500 adjustable flaps, none of which prevents him from plummeting earthwards. **Discs:** Both DVDs (released separately) are derived from the recent director-approved restorations, and both accordingly look superb, though *Lust for Love* has some distracting audio wobbles during the (very occasional) piano interludes. The English subtitles are compulsory in both cases. (MB)

Carlos Saura's Flamenco Trilogy

Blood Wedding

Spain 1981; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 71 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Carmen

Spain 1983; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

El amor brujo

Spain 1986; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 104 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

Films: In 1981, as the *movida* was heating up Spain, with Almodóvar as its master of ceremonies, Carlos Saura was setting off in a very different direction, turning away from his internationally lauded political films, such as *Ana y los lobos* (1973) and *Cría cuervos* (1976), towards a new focus on dance, his longtime passion (he famously tried to train as a flamenco dancer). The first articulation of this was a thrilling flamenco trilogy, now released as three separate DVDs by StudioCanal, in which Saura retained his strong connections with Spanish folklore and popular traditions while finding vehicles for his lifelong admiration for the work of Lorca.

These riveting studies of the art of flamenco were in fact the outcome of a collaboration between Saura and the greatest male dancer and choreographer of his generation, Antonio Gades, whose revolutionary fusion of classical ballet and flamenco, expressed through a distinctively elegant and austere minimalism, had already transformed dance irrevocably.

Saura's ambitious trilogy includes *El amor brujo* (*Love, the Magician*) and *Blood Wedding*, versions of Lorca's poems that Gades had choreographed and danced on stage in Madrid between 1971-74, as well as probably the best known of the three, a flamenco version of Bizet/Mérimée's *Carmen* (1983).

Blood Wedding inaugurates the trilogy in fairly straightforward documentary style, ushering the viewer

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backstage with Gades and his troupe as they rehearse Lorca's sung poem about a newlywed woman torn between two men. Filming in the rehearsal studio allowed Saura to place the camera in extreme close-up on the dancers' and musicians' faces, hands and feet, creating a palpable intense intimacy not only between them but also with the viewer, who participates emotionally in Gades's inventive choreography and the self-abandoned dedication and physical effort of the dancers. Gades's notorious emphasis on discipline allowed Saura and longtime cinematographer Teo Escamilla to plan camera positions in advance and thus film without interruptions, and as a result the flowing, implausibly weightless camera moves appear to be capturing the dance sequences in one seamless take.

In *Carmen*, fiction spills over into reality during the rehearsal of the flamenco ballet version of this iconic tale, which includes snatches of Bizet's opera. Saura liberates the protagonist from her traditionally frivolous, superficial image and in Laura del Sol's bewitching performance she becomes a modern woman ahead of her time, though still possessed of the fierce intensity and tempestuous sensuality of the deadly proto-femme fatale.

The trilogy is rounded off with the more generic musical *El amor brujo*, a ghost story not dissimilar in its gaudily colourful style to Hollywood greats like *West Side Story*, yet indebted to a stagier 1980s aesthetic. The idea here is to shift flamenco away from the rehearsal room and back to its street roots, with gypsy slums convincingly reconstructed on a massive soundstage. Even if it doesn't hit the heights of the previous two films, it still manages to conjure the magic – or *duende* – in an electrifying centrepiece scene drawing on the music of composer Manuel de Falla.

At a time when new digital technologies – 3D in particular – seem to have found a natural ally in dance (*Pina*, *StreetDance* etc), Saura's immersive explorations of film's ability to portray movement seem to acquire new dimensions. Surpassing the formal constraints of both dance and film, his trilogy is a cinematic tour de force, one that captures Gades, his dance partner Cristina Hoyos and other legendary figures of flamenco, such as guitarist Paco de Lucía, at the peak of their respective powers, fashioning a stunning testimony to the beauty of flamenco which remains unmatched.

Discs: The image transfer of the three discs is of a high standard, although the sound on *El amor brujo* is of rather poor quality. (MD-D)

Films by Imamura Shohei

The Insect Woman

1963 Japan; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 123 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: 'Nishi Ginza Station', director interview, booklet including Tony Rayns essays

The Eel

1997 Japan; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD;

Certificate 18; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Films: Thirty-four years separate them in time, but in both these films the great Japanese director Imamura Shohei looks to the natural world for metaphors of resilience to contextualise the travails of his outsider protagonists.

Made in 1963, *The Insect Woman* opens with a rather impressive beetle going about its business, a prelude to the abrasive fictional biography of Tome (Hidari Sachiko, best actress at Berlin), a daughter of the soil who endures decades of exploitation before turning the tables on an avaricious madam. Fast-forward to *The Eel*, Imamura's second Cannes Palme d'Or winner, and Koji Yakusho's troubled central character, a paroled killer whose past still hangs heavy on him, draws strength from the migratory challenges overcome by the freshwater *unagi* he keeps as a pet. The comparisons are in no way to the detriment of Imamura's embattled individuals, since his commitment to the socially marginalised is a definite constant in an otherwise mercurial filmography – as illustrated by the stylistic gulf between these two releases.

Filming a script based on the actual experiences of a Tokyo bar hostess, Imamura set himself the challenge of shooting *The Insect Woman* entirely on location, turning restrictions in camera placement to his advantage with sundry one-shot scenes making the most of

the widescreen frame and the evident commitment of his performers. The low-rent locales, volatile physicality and often queasy sensuality are pretty much Imamura trademarks by this time, yet the long takes never seem static, instead contrasting effectively with newsreel footage cataloguing protests against Japan's submissive post-war relations with the US. As Hidari's indefatigable Tome slugs her way out of servitude there's an obviously geopolitical resonance intended, but such state-of-the-nation inferences sit slightly uneasily beside the streetwise specificity of an otherwise spiky drama.

Certainly, that kind of overview is absent from *The Eel*, made when Imamura the elder statesman had settled down into a role as wise observer of the human comedy. There's more evident warmth here, notwithstanding Koji's unsentimental central turn as the pensive ex-con worried he'll blow his chances of a new life as a barber in a Chiba backwater if he reveals the crime of passion that put him inside. More of an ensemble feel too, as various local wastrels and oddballs throng around the shop, which keeps us alert since we're never sure where the next significant plot point's coming from. The underlying sensibility is still as combative as ever, but the form has moved on – now we see a cinematic master at work, playing all the angles, always assured that the camera is in



The Insect Woman Imamura Shohei looks to the natural world for metaphors of resilience to contextualise the travails of his outsider protagonists

exactly the right spot. A different kind of pleasure from a filmmaker who offers many of them.

Discs: An impeccable Blu-ray for *The Insect Woman*, augmented by one of Imamura's early quickies for Nikkatsu, the flimsy comedy *Nishi Ginza Station*, as well as a valuable 20-minute TV interview with Imamura and predictably worthwhile notes by Tony Rayns in the substantial booklet. The top-notch package from Eureka is in marked contrast to the barebones Artificial Eye offering, where *The Eel* is letterboxed within a 4:3 frame (and expanding the image to fit a 16:9 screen merely magnifies a soft and somewhat washed-out DVD transfer). (TJ)

Treasure Train

Fernando Arrabal; Canada 1982; Odyssey Moving Images/Region A Blu-ray; 81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: interview with Mickey Rooney

Film: It seems dismissable: a children's film starring an ageing Mickey Rooney that no one has ever heard of, released by an unknown company and proclaimed on its case to be "as witty as Pippi Longstocking!" Then you study the fine print and discover that the director is Fernando Arrabal, neo-surrealist and Panic Movement troublemaker, and that *Treasure Train* is in fact also known as *The Emperor of Peru* (or sometimes *Odyssey of the Pacific*), and is Arrabal's fourth feature, made seven years after *The Guernica Tree*. It's not a film that has ever been on anyone's radar; what exactly brought the prolific Parisian rebel-artist to Canada in 1982 to make a perfectly ridiculous children's film starring the most obnoxious of old-school Hollywood hams remains a ripe mystery. (His co-conspirators were producer Claude Léger and Canadian novelist Roger Lemelin.) We are, in any case, many terrestrial miles away from Arrabal's earlier films, from *Viva la muerte* (1971) on, each of them an anarchic spit-shot in society's eye, chock-a-block with taboo tableaux and violative juxtapositions.

Perhaps in someone's eyes proto-surrealism and children's films complemented each other, but *The Emperor of Peru* (one can, I think, ignore the new, clumsily plastered title) is dire silliness, in which three children (one of them a Cambodian refugee, precipitating some of the cheesiest flashback representations of the South-East Asian war ever filmed) cavort in the Canadian woods and discover a senile old engineer (Rooney) and a vine-covered derelict station, where the crazy coot's prize steam engine sits unused. Amid a myriad of Walter Mitty-esque fantasy scenes in which the youngest (Jonathan Starr) imagines himself a racing driver, a master conductor etc, the kids clean up the train and use it to escape when news comes that the Cambodian boy is to be sent back home. Arrabal seems to have enjoyed the Canadian parklands, but there's precious little sign of Panicking – this might be the most extreme case of

a distinctive filmmaker forgetting himself for the sake of a pay cheque. A little too off-rhythm and creepy for kids, the movie is an uncomfortable freak, with a bouncy soundtrack that could trigger suicidal depressions.

Disc: The transfer is nice but the dubbing is poor and the set-up menu deplorable. The couch interview with the frail 91-year-old Rooney illuminates little – Arrabal “was a lovely man”. (MA)

Urbanized

Gary Hustwit; US/UK 2011; Plexifilm/Region 0; Certificate E; 85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: additional interviews and footage, booklet with liner notes by Gary Hustwit

Film: *Urbanized*, the third documentary in Gary Hustwit's ‘design’ trilogy after *Helvetica* (2007) and *Objectified* (2009), explores how design affects the world's cities. The film includes interviews with leading architects, politicians, design experts and historians, and shows how the tendency to live in cities started slowly but gathered pace in the 20th century – soon, it is predicted, some 75 per cent of the world's population will live in cities.

Urbanized is less than 90 minutes long, but Hustwit manages to cover a huge amount of territory: there is a discussion of how Baron Haussmann redesigned Paris in the 19th century; an activist from Mumbai talks about the hygiene problems faced by those living in the city's slums; architect Oscar Niemeyer talks about his designs for Brasília; and the mayor of Copenhagen explains his policy for ensuring that the city's residents take to their bikes. The filmmakers also reflect on the ‘garden city’ movement and the problem of urban sprawl.

The tone is earnest and utopian, and even though there is no commentary or presenter, the inference is clear: all we need is sensible, aesthetically pleasing, eco-conscious town planning and cities' problems will melt away.

Full of very beautifully shot footage of everywhere from Mumbai's slums to the small streets of Brighton, the documentary makes every city look alluring. At the same time, the talking-head interviewees often lament the state into which cities have fallen and fret about their uncertain futures. Maybe that is Hustwit's point – most cities are in a perpetual state of both renewal and decay.

Disc: The extras include in-depth interviews with many of the experts seen only fleetingly in the documentary itself. The disc does full justice to the impressive cinematography by Luke Geissbühler. (GM)

This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, James Bell, Michael Brooke, Vera Brunner-Sung, Roger Clarke, Mar Diestro-Dóido, Trevor Johnston, Geoffrey Macnab, Kim Newman, Nick Pinkerton and Kate Stables



Game of Thrones A thunderingly entertaining medieval yarn that spices up the usual trappings of the genre with lashings of sex and violence

Friendly Fire

Martin Starger/Marble Arch Productions/ABC; US 1979; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; 141 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Programme: After 11 years starring in her popular variety show, comedienne Carol Burnett really changed tack with *Friendly Fire*, one of the first US network dramas to deal with the repercussions of the Vietnam War. It tells the true story of two years in the lives of Peg Mullen and her husband Gene (Ned Beatty) and their attempts to discover the truth about their son's killing in an artillery ‘accident’.

Fay Kanin's script, based on the book of the same title by journalist Courtlandt Bryan (played here by Sam Waterstone), smartly structures the narrative as a mystery, and it is almost two hours before we are provided with detailed flashbacks that seem to show how the death took place. The main emphasis, however, is really on the unlikely radicalisation of an Iowa family considered part of Nixon's ‘silent majority’. Plumbing the depths of their sense of indignation, the story draws to a pleasingly ambiguous finale in which Bryan's attempt to construct an objective journalistic ‘truth’ – one that he believes will finally give the grieving parents some closure – is roundly rejected. Only occasionally succumbing to the temptation to grandstand, this is a restrained and well-acted film that still has something to say about the business of war.

Disc: The image is somewhat lacking in fine detail and the soundtrack

occasionally suffers from distortion, doing little for Leonard Rosenman's minimalist score. (SA)

Game of Thrones

HBO; US 2011; Warner Home Video/Region B Blu-ray; 671 minutes; Certificate 18; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, ‘Anatomy of an Episode’ documentary, featurettes, ‘making of’, previews, interactive guides

Programme: This rich and complex medieval saga, from George R.R. Martin's continuing ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’ series, spices up the usual trappings of the genre (regicide, political chicanery, stabbings back and front) with lashings of sex, in-your-face violence and even incest. The result is a thunderingly entertaining yarn that takes no prisoners, with major characters frequently dispatched in the wake of its grand dynastic sweep.

An epic fantasy in the Tolkien mould, it stars *Lord of the Rings* alumnus Sean Bean as Eddard ‘Ned’ Stark, the stern but honourable ruler of the northern kingdom (one of seven). The realm is in hock to the dissolute Lannisters, and war soon breaks out after the queen kills the wayward king, with pretenders to the throne sprouting from the frozen north and the barbarous plains to the south.

Sean Bean's Stark may be the traditional hero here but, looking to subsequent volumes, the series rightly emphasises the role of children in the machinations,

with episodes usually concluding with their fate left hanging in the balance.

The regular delivery of gore and ferocious profanity occasionally feels a tad mechanical, seemingly part of HBO's rigid per-episode quota of sex, nudity and extreme cussing. However, the huge cast is populated with credible and multi-shaded characters, the most impressive of them undoubtedly Tyrion, the so-called ‘imp’. Despite being one of the villainous Lannisters, he is easily the most intelligent and charismatic character on the field, and Peter Dinklage is truly majestic in the role (only a slightly wandering British accent strikes a false note).

Discs: The Blu-ray edition boasts extremely high bit rates, doing wonders for the digital video and a superbly detailed audio mix. The cast and crew commentaries are pretty informative, though on an anecdotal level the one featuring the child actors is hard to beat for sheer charm. The most substantial of the featurettes is a one-hour look at the making of the pivotal sixth episode. (SA)

Male of the Species

ATV/ITV; UK 1969; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; 82 minutes; Certificate PG; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: stills gallery, script PDFs

Programme: Playwright Alun Owen portrays the battle between the sexes as a succession of emotional letdowns, tactical feints and insincere incantations in this jaundiced trio of plays, introduced on screen by an uncomfortable-looking Laurence Olivier. Anna Calder-Marshall connects them as a young woman moving from one disappointment to the next in her encounters with a Scotsman, an Irishman and a Welshman. After discovering that her swarthy and charismatic father (Sean Connery, exuding brute animal magnetism) is a serial liar, she leaves home and goes to work as a typist at an architects' firm, where she tries to get her revenge on the resident lothario (Michael Caine). This segment is the funniest and probably the most successful, thanks to some smart dialogue (“That stab with those two ribbons of ice you call lips... South of the border we call that frostbite”) and a ‘no harm, no foul’ conclusion that is quietly affecting. Her final encounter, with an eminent barrister (Paul Scofield), sees her jettisoned as the latest in a long line of dalliances.

Despite the predictably crushing conclusion, the high-profile stars (working for scale in aid of charity) provide good value and make this curio certainly worthy of a quick look.

Disc: The image reproduction is only fair given the limitations of late 1960s colour video. The most interesting extra is the script for an alternative ending made for the US, which reintroduced Caine's character for a more upbeat finish. (SA)

Majoring in Barbara

Nick Pinkerton savours a book that's less a biography than a film-by-film paean

Barbara Stanwyck: The Miracle Woman

By Dan Callahan, University Press of Mississippi, 272pp, £35.95, ISBN 9781617031830

The arrival of this critical biography is an opportunity to marvel at the pure cumulative accomplishment of Barbara Stanwyck's career, working with a motley array of Hollywood's auteur talents while remaining always, essentially, herself. And indeed the author of *'The Miracle Woman'* does marvel: for Dan Callahan, Stanwyck – “the finest or at least the most consistently fine actress of her time in American movies” – has a special genius, like Cagney's or Anna Magnani's, which consisted of “merging the best kind of theatricality ('this is happening right now, in front of you, only once') with a miraculous kind of freshness”.

According to the dust-jacket bio, Callahan is a New York City-based “independent film scholar”. This is his first book, although he has for some time written involved and erudite appreciations online of lesser-known actors like Constance Collier and David Manners – or recently, in these pages, of Gene Tierney. Callahan has made acting his particular bailiwick, crossing eras with ease — he's one of few writers under 40 who can freely use phrases like “Ralph Bellamy type” and seem as though he knows precisely what he's talking about. (Callahan likes to contrast Stanwyck's playing of a scene, almost invariably favourably, to how other actresses of the period might have approached it.)

The basics of Stanwyck's personal life are covered here: her hardscrabble youth in Brooklyn as Ruby Stevens, abandoned as a result of her father's fecklessness and her mother's early death; the teenage Ruby's escape from poverty in the ranks of the chorus line; her ill-starred marriages, now renamed ‘Barbara Stanwyck’, to abusive ‘King of Vaudeville’ Frank Fay and, overseen by MGM publicity, to one-time co-star Robert Taylor; her flop as a mother to Dion, the son she adopted with Fay.

Rumours of same-sex dalliances in the private spinsterhood that composed Stanwyck's later life are treated as exactly that. Callahan deals in the incontrovertible facts of this woman's life, rather than “who might have said what to whom at the Cocoanut Grove”. What he has attempted is not a traditional biography, which is perhaps just as well — as Jacques Tournier is quoted as saying of Stanwyck: “She lives for two things, and both of them are work.” *'The Miracle Woman'*, aptly, reveals its subject through a detailed, film-by-film exegesis of Stanwyck's screen



Stanwyck in her prime: “the finest actress of her time in American movies”

persona as it was developed over seven decades and 82 films.

Rather than attempting a straight chronology of Stanwyck's professional life, Callahan has grouped like with like, building chapters around the actress's collaborations with writer-directors (Frank Capra, whose 1930 *'Ladies of Leisure'* was Stanwyck's star-making part, William Wellman, Preston Sturges, Billy Wilder, Douglas Sirk) as well as work in particular categories of film ('Pre-Code Sex', 'Screwball Stanwyck').

Analysing performance, Callahan is a reverse engineer with an itchy rewind finger, stripping down scenes to their component parts. He's hyperattentive to the technical 'how' of performance, and an actor's strengths and weaknesses: Stanwyck is bad doing drunk scenes, he notes; pronouncing 'to' was a speed-bump, her “wooden word”. Callahan also frequently displays an omnipotent surety about how every aspect of a scene should be played or shot — which decisions “work” and which do not — that recalls a certain chicken farmer named Kael's daughter from Petaluma, California.

Callahan has seemingly ingested every bit of backstage scuttlebutt that's come his way, often produced here to insightful ends: discussing the failure of *'Golden Boy'* (1939), Callahan relays director Rouben Mamoulian's tendency to tell actors the camera was running when it wasn't, and vice versa, speculating how

He follows the theme of abject sexual hunger that runs through her films

this might have played hell with first-take actress Stanwyck. (Capra's sensitivity to his actress's pacing is noted, by contrast.) *'A Lost Lady'* (aka *'Courageous'*, 1934), we're told, was “originally intended for the clotheshorse Kay Francis” — hence the “succession of ugly, unflattering Orry-Kelly gowns that Stanwyck is made to model”.

More than changing fashion, though, Callahan is concerned with the eternal. “Stanwyck's work here will always be modern,” Callahan concludes of *'Ladies of Leisure'*, “because it will always be 'true to life.'” At best, Callahan epigrammatically notes the eternal human truths within Stanwyck's performances. Discussing the softening of Stanwyck's hardened prostitute in *'Ladies'*, he pinpoints a moment where “old defenses kick up a fight for dominance and a maelstrom of reasons not to feel love.” Later, discussing Stanwyck in Sam Fuller's 1957 *'Forty Guns'*, Callahan comes closest to trying to understand what lay behind right-winger Stanwyck's devotion to the principles of Ayn Rand: “Jessica, and people like her who have made themselves winners, can't afford to sympathize with such abject weakness, even needing to look on it as a kind of contagious disease.”

Along these same lines, Callahan also deftly follows the theme of abject sexual hunger tinged with masochism that runs through Stanwyck's filmography, from Capra's *'The Bitter Tea of General Yen'* (1933) to Fritz Lang's *'Clash by Night'* (1952) to *'Forty Guns'*. This isn't material that flatters the actress, or the viewer who recognises themselves in her — and this, precisely, is the book's argument for Stanwyck's greatness.

Writing Pictures: Screenwriting Made (Mostly) Painless

By Joseph McBride, Faber and Faber, 365pp, £20, ISBN 9780571274376

Best known for his heavyweight studies of directors such as Capra, Welles and Ford, Joseph McBride has also enjoyed careers as the screenwriter of films including *Rock 'n' Roll High School* (1975) and, latterly, as a professor at San Francisco State University. As you might expect from such an accomplished film historian, the great appeal of his guide to screenwriting lies in the breadth of his frame of reference. In place of the sort of screenplays often held up as exemplars of the form in screenwriting manuals (*The Karate Kid*, *Lethal Weapon*), McBride cites films the *Sight & Sound* reader can get a bit more impassioned about, from *Tokyo Story* and *Double Indemnity* to *Brokeback Mountain* and *Sideways*. And while he quotes the usual suspects, from Aristotle to William Goldman via Howard Hawks (whose wonderfully illuminating interviews with the author, first published as *Hawks on Hawks*, are liberally quoted), he also finds room for insights from Chekhov, Noël Coward, Picasso and T.S. Eliot.

While McBride's eminence as a biographer might lead one to expect a wide-ranging work aimed at the general reader, this is however very much a ‘how to’ handbook aimed at students, and no doubt expanded from lecture notes. McBride has a useful theory that the best way to learn screenwriting is by adapting an existing short story — that way the tyro can learn the basics of structure without worrying whether his or her story is any good in the first place. But as a result, a good third of this book is made up of a blow-by-blow exercise in turning a Jack London story into outline, character biog, treatment, step outline and, finally, a 27-page screenplay. While this would be a worthwhile exercise to undertake on a university course, it's hard to imagine a casual reader slogging through all these stages on their own initiative, however good for them the medicine might be.

In his introduction ‘Who Needs Another Book on Screenwriting?’, McBride refers approvingly to *Adaptation's* lampooning of “an intemperate screenwriting teacher (modeled on a certain luminary in the field)”, and promises he won't be peddling any “slavish formulas”. But in the absence of an overarching theory à la McKee, all he's really offering is a round-up of anecdotes, old-timer tips and expertly deconstructed movie moments that would probably be more compelling in lecture form — and is more likely to have you reaching nostalgically for your DVD of *Only Angels Have Wings* than firing up your laptop in a burst of creative inspiration.

👉 John Wrathall

The Cinema of Alexander Sokurov

Edited by Birgit Beumers and Nancy Condee, I.B. Tauris, London, 288pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781848853430

Overdue after 34 years of restlessly inventive, palpably personal and epically arcane filmmaking that could actively use more than a little study, this pioneering academic exegesis of the work of Russian director Alexander Sokurov is something of a tumult itself, veering from the academic to the on-set procedural. The catholicism makes sense, because Sokurov is one of the least easily wrangled filmmakers at work today; his enormous oeuvre feels both distinctive *in toto* and as unpredictable and strange as a series of organic mutations.

Works as disparate as the found-footage diatribe *Sonata for Hitler* (1979/87), the shadowy Flaubert adaptation *Save and Protect* (1990), the elliptical five-hour war doc *Spiritual Voices* (1995), the extraterrestrial mirage of *Mother and Son* (1997), the one-shot Russian-history-as-plan-séquence stunt *Russian Ark* (2002) and the “power tetralogy” of *Moloch* (1999), *Taurus* (2001), *The Sun* (2005) and *Faust* (2011) all feel ineluctably Sokurovian, while still frustrating any conventional effort to collect them within a single stylistic, thematic or poetic point of view.

With 12 new essays and nine



Sokurov: “one of the least easily wrangled filmmakers at work today”

reprinted “Russian responses”, Beumers and Condee’s volume does a surprisingly thorough job elucidating and sorting out the rudimentary realities of a career that IMDb can hardly keep straight. Thankfully, evocation of the films’ plastic realities is given pride of place, and theoretic jargon is largely ignored. In fact most of the exegesis on hand tends towards nuts-and-bolts discussion of Sokurov’s cultural contexts, his political realities (all of Sokurov’s films made before 1987 have two dates – completion and exhibition – since his entire ten-year

output before perestroika was secreted away by the censors) and his complex (that is, often inexplicable) lyricism, particularly as it colours portraits of historical figures often imagined during life passages in which nothing much is happening at all. Jeremy Hicks’s discussion of the documentaries is invaluable, and even several key shorts, including *Maria: Peasant Elegy* (1978/88) and *Evening Sacrifice* (1984/87), are searched for corollaries. Julian Graffy’s no-stone-unturned dissection of *Days of Eclipse* (1988) more than acknowledges the film’s maddening elusiveness –

and doesn’t even bother suggesting that it is, in fact, science fiction.

Naturally, given their tangible if enigmatic relationship with sociopolitics, the tetralogy and *Russian Ark* get the most attention; the production of the latter is combed over in several essays, to the extent that José Alaniz’s essay makes subtextual points out of the array of “flubs” that arise during the film’s celebrated 90-minute single take, and shows how the very form of the film inspired both fascination and public squabbles (between Sokurov and nearly everyone, including the heroic German cinematographer Tilman Büttner) after it was released. Less formalist, the political portrait films are analysed for their defiant refusal to be political, and for their sometimes bizarre narrative idiosyncrasies.

Throughout the book there is a rather invigorating sense of struggle – Sokurov looms like a quantum phenomenon, and everybody leans in closer, fuelled and befuddled, sharpening their microscopic focal points. This is only the first necessary step towards Sokurov studies, and one that might actually aid and abet our practical appreciation of the work, so much of which provides context for the rest – and much of which is still difficult for Westerners to see.

♦ Michael Atkinson

Full Service

By Scotty Bowers with Lionel Friedberg, Grove Press, 288pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781611856071

As cheerful, energetic and good-natured a book about prostitution and sexual excess as you’ll ever read, *Full Service* is a kiss-and-tell-all autobiography by octogenarian Scotty Bowers, who arrived in LA fresh out of the Marines in 1945 and took a job at a gas station on Hollywood Boulevard. Born to please, Scotty filled ‘em up while developing a little-black-book operation fuelled by his own unfeasibly high sex drive. (Married twice and claiming to have had two or three partners a day for 30 or 40 years, Scotty was unsurprisingly hired by Alfred Kinsey as research material.)

Tantalisingly, the book has no index, but reads like a who’s who of Hollywood from the 1940s to the 1970s, with name-checked traffic including Walter Pidgeon, Cole Porter, Cary Grant, George Cukor, Katharine Hepburn, Vincent Price, Cecil Beaton, Spencer Tracy, Noël Coward, Mae West, Ramon Novarro, Tyrone Power, John Carradine, Rock Hudson, Anthony Perkins, Roddy McDowall, Edith Piaf, Tennessee Williams, Raymond Burr, J. Edgar Hoover, Bob Hope, John Holmes, Linda Lovelace and Nestor Almendros. There’s also royalty (Edward and Mrs Simpson) sorted out amidst the film industry’s back-room boys and the innumerable regular johns who passed through the gas station. Everyone was at it.

For aficionados of tittle-tattle, there are – apparently – no real surprises here, but it’s the sheer scale and pace of Scotty’s sexual history that make this book so fresh and entertaining (the film rights to *Full Service* have already been bought), while reminding us of what the Hays Code did to film language, how corporate studios controlled stars’ images and what life was like for LA’s gay community when homosexuality was a crime. It’s also a time capsule, demonstrating how sexual business was carried out before the invention of the internet and mobile phones.

Despite scenes of wartime carnage and the death of Scotty’s daughter following a botched back-street abortion, this is the opposite of a misery memoir. Even when Scotty recounts growing up in Depression-era Illinois and being abused by his friend’s father and local priests, the tone is breezy. Non-judgemental in his adult life, Scotty took each trick as it came, remembering X-rated high jinks involving gang-bangs, coffins, “Big Lace Curtains”, glory holes and unmentionably vile sandwiches (why did Charles Laughton bother to wash the tomatoes?).

Although teetotal himself, Scotty had a compassionate approach to macho drunken impotence, gallantly stepping in to finish the job when Errol Flynn passed out. (Scotty eventually left the gas station to become a barman with Scotty Bowers: “the sheer scale of his sexual history makes this entertaining”

a unique method of mixing cocktails.) Instead of portraying a violent, stylised 1950s LA, Scotty describes giving a sympathetic blowjob to the unhappy vice cop assigned to bust him, which leads to a touching LTR. There’s no dark despair or mental illness (apart from

Scotty’s satisfying fling with the “highly strung” Vivien Leigh), and no sign of any sexually transmitted diseases until Aids looms and the book finally runs out of steam around the mid-1980s.

But is it truth, exaggeration or urban legend – and does it matter? Unlike Kenneth Anger’s more caustic *Hollywood Babylon* books written between the 1960s and the 1980s, when many of the stars were still alive and could sue, all those named here are now dead, and Scotty himself probably doesn’t have long to go. In telling his story, Bowers was assisted by South African-born TV producer/writer Lionel Friedberg, who taped and transcribed 150 hours of interviews with Scotty, adding factual details “to augment Scotty’s recollections”. A carefully worded upfront note accredited to Scotty states, “This manuscript is based on my memory and, to the very best of my ability, reflects actual incidents and personalities as I recall them.” Meanwhile Gore Vidal gives a firm reference: “Scotty doesn’t lie.” A quick search of the internet confirms that he doesn’t always tell the whole truth, however; the book’s sunset happy ending barely hints that variety is still the spice of Scotty’s life.

♦ Jane Giles



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In praise of piracy?

Sometimes my reading lags behind, as if I intend to see a film, I don't read your reviews until afterwards. I enjoyed *Hugo*, but enjoyed even more Andrew Osmond's artful deconstruction of it (S&S, February) – exactly the kind of incisive articulation I expect from S&S. I wonder, though, whether Scorsese saw the irony of a film that valorises cinema itself featuring a scene in which the protagonists steal access to a movie instead of paying for it. Does this mean downloading's OK for urchins?

Jonathan Clements

By email

Projection projections

I heard a very sad story yesterday. I was speaking to the chief projectionist at my local multiplex and found out that the whole projection team is being made redundant next month and being replaced by a single 'technical manager' who will simply programme their 15 screens (and presumably double up as a popcorn-seller for the rest of his/her working day).

He asked me whether we were 'going digital' this year – I run an independent cinema. I told him we were going to have to lose one of our 35mm projectors to make room for a new digital one, but that it wasn't a matter of choice. We are hanging onto 35mm for as long as we possibly can, but our hand is really being forced by the industry. It seems to me that the independent sector is moving as fast, if not faster, than the mainstream into the digital world and we are seeing far more independent films being released in digital-only format. For small single-screen venues like this one, we are either going to have to saddle up to digital or miss the last coach out of town. If it wasn't for the work of the Digital Funding Partnership, we would be lost and completely unable to afford even a partial conversion.

I understand the financial issues for the small distributors and I understand that progress is progress, but when this is having a direct effect on jobs and on a skillset that could be lost within the next

Shutter man:
Scorsese in 'Hugo'



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Into the woods

I enjoyed reading B. Kite's article on David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* ('Remain in Light', S&S, March). I would like to suggest however, that contrary to Kite's argument, there is actually a significant element of Christian influence on Lynch's work to go alongside that of the Indian Vedanta and a certain "cartooned gnosticism". A fruitful way into this is through C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. To take just *Twin Peaks*, for example, the White and Black Lodges, their location in the woods on the outskirts of town and the Man from Another Place all have interesting parallels in *The Magician's Nephew*, the first book, chronologically speaking, in the *Narnia* series. The character Digory's description of "The Wood Between the Worlds" in Chapter 3 as "a sort of in-between place" that "isn't in any of the worlds, but once you've found that place you can get into them all" is certainly pure Lynch. And don't



the evil Bob (above) and his former accomplice, the one-armed man Mike, call to mind the Archangel Michael and the Fallen Angel, Lucifer

(or Beelzebub)? Or is it just me?

Dr Darren Mulloy
Wilfrid Laurier University,
Ontario, Canada

ten years, I'd like to see a bit more of a debate about the wider economic as well as creative issues.

In this light, has anyone else been struck by the bitter irony presented by Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* – a film that has been called a love letter to cinema and a moving plea for film preservation? As I sat in the cinema watching Ben Kingsley's Méliès shuffle out of his room saying, "Ah, I would recognise the sound of a film projector anywhere," I felt like standing up and shouting, "Not in here you wouldn't, Monsieur M. Not in here!"

Anna Navas

Film programmer, Plymouth Arts Centre

Not forgotten

I read with interest your 'Letter of the month' (S&S, April) regarding the decision not to include Google Withers in the broadcast of our Film Awards on Sunday 12 February. As you know, we pay tribute to those from our industries who have passed away at both our Film and Television Awards. Due to time constraints, we can only choose a small number of individuals to feature in the broadcasts of these awards ceremonies and, in order to pay tribute to as many people as possible, an individual may only appear in one ceremony.

We recognise that Google had an extremely distinguished film career, but decided that if we included her in the Film Awards broadcast, this would mean that we would not be able to

recognise her iconic television roles at our Television Awards on 27 May. As she was a Television BAFTA award winner, the decision was reached that the Television Awards would be

the most appropriate ceremony for a celebration of Google's work. I can also confirm that Google was featured in the 'Memoriam' section of the Film Awards brochure, and we have an obituary of her on our website.

It is an almost impossible task to decide who to include in this section of our awards, from literally hundreds who pass away each year in our industries, but it is one we take extremely seriously. It is especially difficult when we are considering someone, like Google, who had a wonderful career in both film and television. I hope I have gone some way to explaining how we reached the decision to honour her at our Television Awards.

Amanda Berry, OBE
Chief executive, BAFTA

Changing 'Lane'

I am just writing to commend Ian Penman on his wonderful evaluation of Monte Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop* ('Lost Highway', S&S, February). The film has been a favourite of mine since I saw it several years ago, and it's one I have struggled to write about myself. There is something about the film that is damn near impossible to communicate on paper. To paraphrase the great G.T.O. himself, its hypnotic journey is one that will give you a set of emotions that will stay with you, largely because they are so difficult to unpack. It's a remarkable quest through a faceless America over which "hangs like a haze the sweet poignancy of defeat" (Thomas Elsaesser).

The reference points are all there in Mr Penman's piece: post Altamont, an America lost; Neil Young's elegiac *Tonight's the Night*; the banal yet affecting photography of William Eggleston's *Los Alamos* – these are wonderfully astute connections to make. Might I also

commend Mr Penman on his subjective approach, particularly his mentioning of affect. *Two-Lane Blacktop* is certainly a film that changes with each viewing.

Costas Thrasyvoulou
Whanganui, New Zealand

Criminal Swedes

In his excellent essay on *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* ('The Icegirl Cometh', S&S, February), Kim Newman tracks the development of the Swedish detective-thriller genre back to the defining influence of the Wahlöö and Sjöwall team in the 1960s. Per Wahlöö's early collaborator was the film director Arne Mattsson, who starting with *The Lady in Black* and *Mannequin in Red* (both 1958) directed a 'colour series' of modern thrillers based on the stories by Folke Mellvig. They are sometimes regarded as precursors of the stylish 1960s Italian giallo film trend.

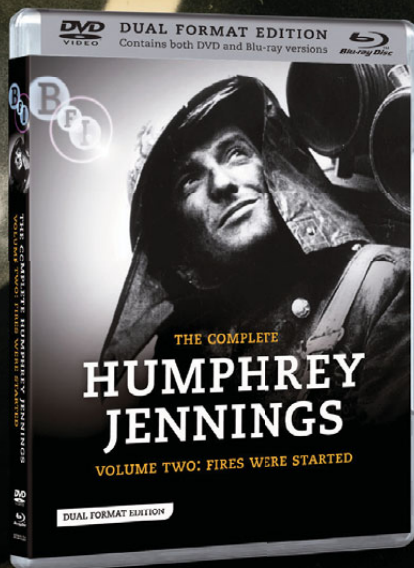
Antti Alanen
Film programmer at the National Audiovisual Archive of Finland and chairman of the Commission for Programming and Access (FIAF), Helsinki

Additions & corrections

April p.54 *Act of Valour*, Certificate 15, 109m 24s, 9,846 ft +5 frames; p.54 *Babycall*, Certificate 15, 96m 18s, 8,667 ft +0 frames; p.58 *Contraband* Arnaldur Indridason is the writer of the film *Reykjavik-Rotterdam*, on which *Contraband* was based; p.60 *Corman's World Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel*, Certificate 15, 86m 17s, 7,765 ft +8 frames; p.61, *Corpo Celeste*, Certificate U, 99m 10s, 8,925 ft +0 frames; p.62 *Headhunters*, Certificate 15, 100m 9s, 9,013 ft +8 frames; p.63 *How to Re-establish a Vodka Empire*, Certificate 12A, 76m 16s, 6,864 ft +0 frames; p.68 *The Island President*, Certificate PG, 101m 12s, 9,108 ft +0 frames; p.74 *Return*, Certificate 15, 98m 8s, 8,832 ft +0 frames; p.75 *Streetdance 2*, Certificate PG, 84m 53s, 7,639 ft +8 frames; p.78 *This Must Be the Place*, Certificate 15, 112m 21s, 10,111 ft +15 frames; p.79 *Tiny Furniture*, Certificate 15, 99m 13s, 8,929 ft +8 frames

READER OFFERS see page 22 for details

'The only true poet of
English cinema' *Lindsay Anderson*



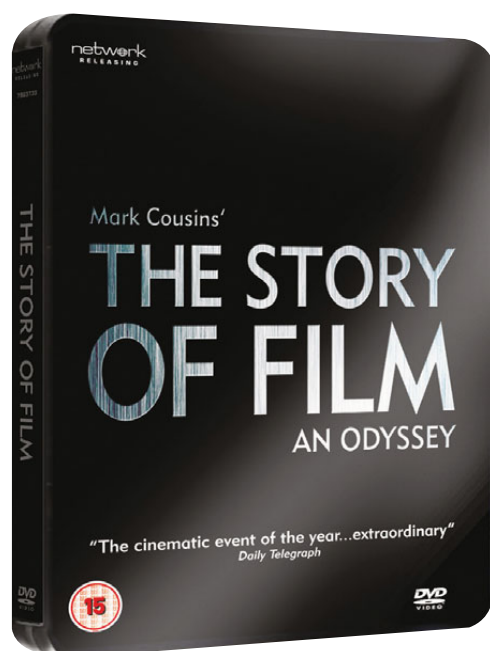
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